

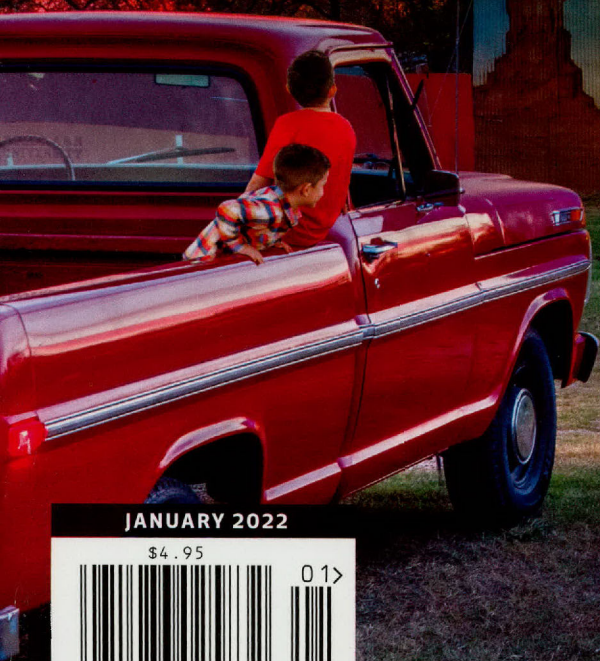
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EDITOR'S
NOTE



Presidio La Bahía in Goliad

Back on Trek

Our writers-at-large have clocked countless hours and hundreds of thousands of miles exploring Texas in their more than 85 collective years writing about the state. Their expertise is put to good use in this month's cover story (Page 42) on what to do and where to go in 2022 for our annual travel bucket list. In addition to their 22 expert picks, I asked them to share their personal travel resolutions for the new year:

Roberto José Andrade Franco: I enjoy a good cigar. Often, when visiting family, I would go with my brother and father to Vitola's—a cigar lounge in downtown El Paso that also has over 100 different brands of whiskey. It's been too long since we've been there, so I hope to return sometime in 2022.

John Nova Lomax: As a fan of architecture and Texas history with an appreciation for the spooky and macabre, a weekend in the Quarters at Presidio La Bahía checks a lot of boxes for me. And maybe, just maybe, I could conjure tragic Col. [James] Fannin's ghost and ask him what the heck he

was thinking with all that lethal dithering.

Clayton Maxwell: Last year I tried to hike the South Rim in Big Bend but couldn't finish because I was still fatigued after a bad case of COVID-19. In 2022 I'm going back, now stronger and with my daughter, and we are going to complete that spectacular loop.

Joe Nick Patoski: There is nothing like a cruise along a Texas highway—especially a road some distance from the cities and suburbs—to clear the head and get the mind wandering. There's some consensus State Highway 16 is the state's most scenic highway, and while I've driven most of it in small chunks, I'd really like to cruise the entire 541-mile stretch from Zapata to just south of Wichita Falls.

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EDITOR IN CHIEF

JANUARY

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Just East of Weird

As Texas small towns continue to experience a renaissance, Bastrop's revitalization marries its storied history with fresh cultural energy.

*By Dina Gachman
Photographs by Melanie Grizzel*

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2022 Texas Bucket List


From pickleball to drive-ins to a primitive beach trip, find something for every interest on our annual list of things to do and places to see throughout the year.

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A Sacred Refuge

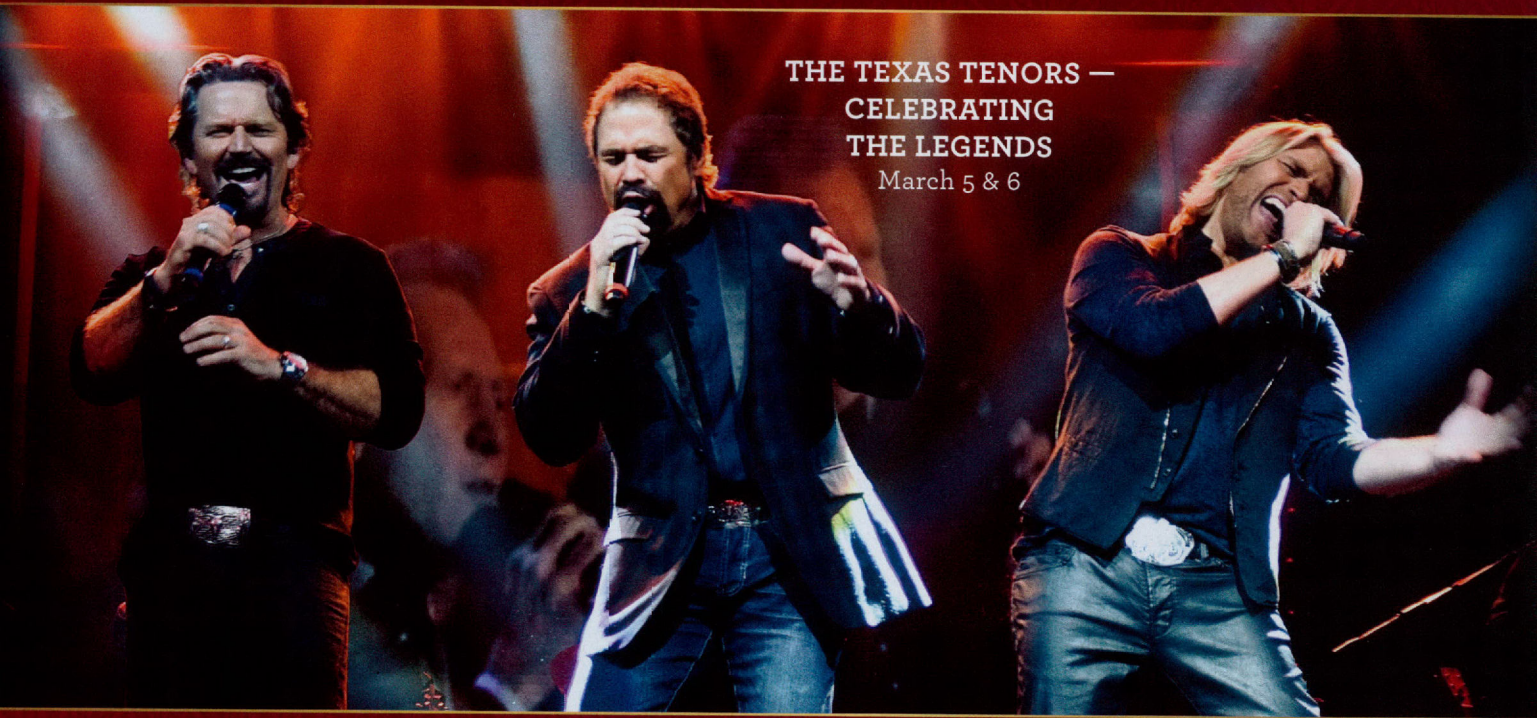
The Comanche Medicine Mounds outside of Quanah in North Texas are a vestige of the tribe's historical Texas homeland.

*By W.K. Stratton
Photographs by Dave Shafer*



THE GRAND MOUND
is visible in the distance
from the ghost town
of Medicine Mound.

THE GRAND 1894 OPERA HOUSE
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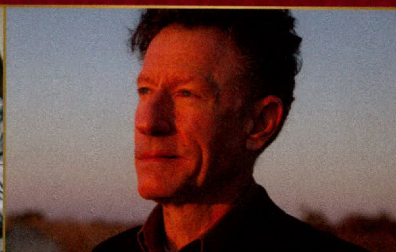
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Photograph by Sean Fitzgerald
Type illustration by Joel Felix
Shot at Galaxy Drive-In in Ennis



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Behind the Story



Contributing editor June Naylor and her husband, Marshall Harris, decided to reinvent their backyard when they married 10 years ago. The couple built a sizeable garden they maintain throughout the year, which helped Naylor write tips and tricks for “Gardening 101” (Page 26). Harris, who once worked as a part-time gardener for the Tarrant Area Food Bank, built raised beds with discarded patio decking material. It took a “series of experiments” to figure out what worked and what didn’t. “Gardening is a lot like marriage or raising children: It takes diligence, attention, and love to be successful,” says Naylor, who lives in Fort Worth. “You have to watch and learn.” They now grow so many veggies and herbs they have to distribute some to their neighbors and local restaurants. “We make all kinds of pickles—sweet, sour, and spicy—along with veggie lasagnas with all the squash,” she says. “My personal favorite is ratatouille—a great comfort dish that’s also really healthy.”

Featured Contributors



Kameron Dunn

In “With Whomever Will Have Me” (Page 12), the Austin-based writer considers his relationship with legendary Austin honky-tonk Broken Spoke, and the experience of being a queer person there. “I’m eager to guide readers through this internal conflict and to give more attention to what is truly my favorite spot in all of Austin,” he says. Dunn grew up in a small town in Bryan County, Oklahoma, and moved to Austin to earn a doctorate in American Studies at the University of Texas, where he researches the inner workings and histories of online subcultures.



Hannah Smothers

Having grown up in a farming family, Smothers says traveling to Blue Heron Farm for “Charmed on the Farm” (Page 66) felt like play rather than work. “It was amazing to spend time nuzzling some goats and to try my hand at milking,” she says. “What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon?” Before moving back to her home state of Texas, Smothers lived for six years in New York, where she worked for *Cosmopolitan* and *VICE*. Now, she lives in San Marcos and is pursuing an MFA in creative writing at Texas State University.

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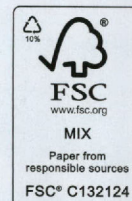
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MERGE

PLATES | 105



Mint to Be

The Lindale Candy Company has kept the holiday season sweet for 75 years

By Sheri Sedgley

The peppermint candy is a holiday tradition for many. It's a sweet treat that's often enjoyed during the winter months. The Lindale Candy Company has been making peppermint candies since 1946. The company is located in Lindale, Texas, and is a family-owned business. The company's founder, Fred Lindale, started the business in 1946. He was inspired by the peppermint candies he had seen in a store in Dallas. He decided to start his own business and make his own peppermint candies. The company has since grown and now produces a variety of candies, including peppermint, chocolate, and caramel. The company is known for its high-quality candies and its commitment to customer service. The company's products are sold in stores across Texas and other states. The company is a popular destination for candy lovers and is a great place to visit during the holiday season.



"You'll see different stripes. It's fun to pick out a candy cane and know nobody else has one like yours."

...mentary on how far he has come in his career. He has been a member of the American Society of Travel Agents for over 20 years. He has also been a member of the National Travel Association and the International Air Transport Association. He has been a speaker at many conferences and has written several articles on travel. He is currently a member of the Texas Society of Travel Agents and is active in the organization. He is also a member of the American Society of Travel Agents and is active in the organization. He is currently a member of the Texas Society of Travel Agents and is active in the organization. He is also a member of the American Society of Travel Agents and is active in the organization.

Signature Seafood

I recommend you try the barbecue crabs at A Touch of Cajun in Nederland ["The Best Thing I Ever Ate in Texas," November].

f Donna Moore, Nederland

Bye-Bye Burgers

The first place I ever ate at in Austin ["Night Hawk No. 2," November]. Loved the steaks. Best apple pie a la mode in Austin!

f Rick Rutherford, Georgetown

Lindale Candy Company

This is the cutest shop ["Mint to Be," November]! Make a road trip and see all the candies, especially the dolls with the peppermint dresses.

ig @deannspringer

I remember seeing peppermint being made at Lindale Candy Company when I was in Brownies. It was so much fun watching the candymakers roll, stretch, and cut the candy. We each got a bag of peppermints at the end of the tour. I loved it! That was 60 years ago.

Sheri Sedgley, Houston

Good Game

A 1971 graduate of Sul Ross State University, I was a student during the women's volleyball championship runs ["Volleyball on the Range," November]. I also had the privilege of studying under Dr. Barton Warnock as well as the other distinguished professors.

Douglas B. Williams, Amarillo

Beach Healing

I'd like to thank Joe Hagan for "Cresting the Wave" [November], which was not only a picturesque essay of prose and imagery, but a deeply inspirational memoir as well. After I read the article to my wife (who is from Corpus Christi and, in fact, lived in a house only a few blocks away from where Hagan attended junior high school), she shared her own stories about the roughly 2-mile stretch of beach from the jetty to Bob Hall Pier, which once served as an escape from a

brutal family home situation. Now, some 40-plus years later, it has become a sort of rediscovered paradise for her beach-bum-wannabe husband. Bob Hall Pier does indeed guard deep family secrets and rich personal history. We have been married for 26 years, and yet some of her history at this time was news to me. It is too long of a tale to relate to you here, albeit a fascinating one, marking the resilience and ultimate triumph of one person's nearly broken spirit to overcome and transform her Bob Hall beach from somewhat of a nightmare escape into the idyllic Eden she considers it to be today.

Kenneth Wayne Bradley, Leander

Me and my hubby Todd are a couple of those kids of the '70s and '80s who gravitated to Bob Hall Pier for the beach, sun, and for Todd, surf. Last year, we moved "home," just in time for Hurricane Hanna and to see the beloved pier be damaged

again. We are glad to see it being rebuilt. *Vicki Mann-Hawthorne, Corpus Christi*

Nice Catch!

Almost 70 years ago, I caught a calf in the Calf Scramble in Houston ["Till the Cows Come Home," November]. Winning entitled me to receive a dairy calf to raise and show. My calf was a Jersey that came from Knolle Dairy Farms in Sandia.

Arlen Williams, Victoria

Staying Sharp

Your October issue featured Sergio Menchaca, custom knife creator, in the article "Forged in Fire." Sergio crafted five custom knives for me. The overall experience proved to be outstanding. The product was perfect. The process was perfect. The results were perfect. I can't recommend him and his products highly enough.

Gary Lambert, Mansfield







Bucket List Bridge

Photographer Kenny Braun took this photo of the Pecos River Bridge on a March evening from the overlook picnic area off US 90. Rising about 273 feet above the water—depending on the level of Lake Amistad—the bridge is the state's highest for drivers (other bridges have trusses or pylons that are taller). In 1957, the Texas Department of Transportation built the bridge, which spans 1,310 feet across the Pecos River between Comstock and Landry on US 90, to replace previous structures that had washed out during floods. Just downstream, the Pecos flows into the Rio Grande at Lake Amistad. "If you like bridges, this is definitely one to see," Braun says. "I'd also suggest renting a kayak or canoe and paddling under the bridge for a completely different experience."





El Campo

Restaurateur Craig Radley welcomes
crawfish fans to the coastal plains

By Heather Brand



CRAIG RADLEY'S
farming and ranching
career led him first to
crawfish farming and
then to the restaurant
industry. He opened
Pinchers in 1999.

El Campo got its start as a railroad camp, nicknamed the “Pearl of the Prairie” for the light of the switching point that would glow over the landscape at night. Set in the coastal plains, the area has long been cattle country. Local vaqueros gave the town the name of El Campo—Spanish for the countryside or field—in 1890. Agriculture has fueled the economy ever since. Farmer, rancher, and restaurateur Craig Radley has spent his entire life in El Campo, minus the four years he studied agricultural economics at Texas A&M University. He returned home to raise cattle and cultivate rice, milo, cotton, and corn, but eventually he branched into crawfish farming, and in 1999 he opened Pinchers Restaurant to sell his own product. Although Radley retired from trapping crawfish after the 2021 season, the 65-year-old continues to operate the restaurant—along with an adjacent candy shop and RV park—with his wife and youngest son.

Rails and Rice

“El Campo’s old downtown is right on the railroad tracks. Back then, the economy was totally agricultural. My grandfather Jesse Myatt moved here in 1905 and was a rice farmer and rancher. A lot of grain elevators around here were originally for rice. Some have been converted now to hold different grains, like milo or corn. Rice has been declining over the years, due to the price and the lack of water, but cattle and cotton are still a big deal here.”

Czech It

“I’m not Czech, but Czechs make up a large portion of our area. When our kids would have baseball or football games in other towns where they don’t have a large Czech presence, it was hilarious to listen to the announcer butcher the Czech names. The local radio station KULP has a Czech polka hour every weekday [8–9 a.m.] and all Saturday morning.”

Crazy for Crawfish

“We’re close to the Gulf Coast. When people pull up here, I want them to have a sense of the water. We serve seafood and have coastal decorations, and we built a pond out front where people can feed the fish and ducks while they’re waiting on their food. If we can’t get fresh crawfish, we don’t serve them. We sell a little bit of everything—all kinds of crabs, étouffée, gumbo, burgers, and po’boys. We get our shrimp fresh and peel and batter them per order. We don’t sell any desserts, except bread pudding. Other than that, our store The Candy Shop is next door. It has a little bit of everything: chocolates, chocolate-covered nuts, and all the gummies that are legal to sell in El Campo, Texas.”

On the Hunt

“E.A. Weinheimer was a doctor here who was an avid hunter of animals all over the world, which he donated to El Campo for a museum. The El Campo Museum of Natural History has a dedicated space in our civic center. Another place people go to is Janik Alligators. They raise gators, trap gators, sell the meat, and use the hides. Larry Janik is a trapper for the state, one of the people the game warden calls when there’s a nuisance gator to be relocated. I think some might get ‘relocated’ to Pinchers; they sell us their alligator meat. Fried alligator is a big hit!”

Unexpected Oasis

“A family called Mobley built the largest residential pool [700,000 gallons] in the country here. When they put their house and pool up for sale, Stephen and Kenna Lucas bought it with enough property to put in an RV park called the Lost Lagoon, and they’ve added all kinds of amenities: a great bar, live entertainment, events, and cook-offs. It’s been a boon for El Campo. People come from other states with their campers to stay for a few days.”

Worth the Trade-Off

“In a small town, everybody knows your business. But then whenever someone is in need, everybody rallies around them. We have the convenience of being about an hour away from the medical center and shopping in Houston, but we don’t have to put up with all the hustle and bustle. I could have started Pinchers in a city and been more successful, but the trade-off is I get to have a business in my hometown and still have all the amenities that a rural area affords you.”



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STOUT

With Whomever Will Have Me

An Okie makes peace with his rural roots
on the dance floor of Austin's Broken Spoke

By Kameron Dunn



After my COVID vaccine reached full efficacy last March, I stepped through the door of the Broken Spoke in South Austin and ordered a Lone Star at the three-seater bar. Relatively new to town, I had been scouring the internet for country bars and landed on the Spoke, lured by

its reputation as one of the last real honky-tonks. I settled into a tall chair facing the dining room and took in the myriad forms of Texana on display: a neon George Strait sign, a studded saddle worth tens of thousands of dollars mounted in a glass case, and a mustachioed mannequin stationed for photo ops. The space feels alive and ghostly at the same time, like having a party in your grandparents' house that's been frozen in time since your mom left at 18.

That night, there were about a dozen of us there listening to local act Lance Lipinsky, an ageless man with a pompadour, bang out some classics on his keyboard. A middle-aged woman with a flowering smile told me she came here just to see him. She sat at a round table near his little setup between the door and the pool table and elicited small shrieks every time he made a comment to the audience, some directed to her.

Charmed, I returned every night that week into the weekend, eventually stepping foot in what felt like a holy space: the dance hall in the back. Down the narrow corridor between a display of celebrity photos with the late founder, James White, and members of the bar staff, I stepped through a door into the massive space on the other side.

Illuminated by neon lights advertising Budweiser and Lone Star, the dance hall extends to a stage with old amps, flanked on either end with dozens of tables outfitted with the kind of weathered chairs I associate with church functions.

I now consider myself a regular and grab a table every other weekend to listen to classic country music played by skilled artists like Alvin Crow and Dale Watson, who have been performing their songs longer than I've been alive, songs I watched them play for months before I finally got the bravery to dance. The people who go to the Broken Spoke are either regulars who've been going there for decades—real country folk—or people encountering the culture for the first time in all its funky candor. When I go, I sip beer and two-step with whomever will have me.

The Broken Spoke is a quintessential piece of Texas history. Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson played here back in the 1970s, and George Strait famously cut his teeth beneath the low-hanging ceiling of the dance hall's stage before he hit it big in the 1980s. Starting in the 1960s, White, the Spoke's owner, cultivated a curious celebration of Texas at the honky-tonk. That hippie-cowboy blend has mostly disappeared in the city, but it nevertheless persists in this slice of old Austin.

I've become evangelical about the Broken Spoke and tell everyone new to Austin or visiting me for a weekend that it's the place to be on a Saturday night. Most of my Austin friends, especially the coastal-expat elites, huff and puff about it. They don't like country music, or they find the prospect of a bunch of old cowboys two-stepping to be hostile.

Outsiders often perceive the country world as hostile—in the realm of Bocephus and tiny white churches, in the bodies of cowboys who angrily return to their families after getting bucked off their horses early in the local rodeos, in the patterns of camouflage and sensations of felt Stetsons, sometimes even in the Southern drawl of the voices. My new friends in Austin are queer like me, and they're scared by the corner of America the Broken Spoke celebrates, at least what they know about the culture from TV, hearsay, and negative experiences.

I was born in the rural South—a part of the country where people say “howdy” in earnest, work on ranches, and wear cowboy hats to formal events—in a small town 10 minutes north of the Red River in Oklahoma. Homophobia is a reality I faced firsthand growing up, which

March 25-26

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In my adulthood, masculinity is a script I've memorized. It's the way of expressing myself that feels the most comfortable, and it adds a layer of security to my day-to-day social life.

has led to my complicated relationship with my hometown, its people, and its broader culture. When I moved to Austin, I wanted to strip myself of all that and do away with both the perception and the reality of my upbringing. But every other weekend I find myself helplessly, lovingly returning to its simulacrum—the Broken Spoke.

I relocated to Austin in 2019 for a PhD in American Studies at the University of Texas. The program is fully funded, meaning I pay no tuition and have a stipend for my living expenses. This allowed me—a low-income, disabled person—an opportunity I otherwise wouldn't have had to move to the big city. I've hit up many of the well-known spots by now: Hippie Hollow, the Drag, the Arboretum, Congress Avenue Bridge for the murmur of bats.

As an Okie, I've traveled between Texas and my small hometown in Bryan County for as long as I've been alive. I've been to all the major cities. The leather jacket I'm wearing as I write this I bought at an antiques shop in downtown Sherman. I've been way out west to the Permian Basin and felt the raw power of lines of wind turbines spinning in the darkness. I've sweltered through 5Ks in the heat of North Dallas. Walked through Beaumont's vacant downtown. Busked at Galveston Beach. And smelled the paper mills of Texarkana. Yet, nothing has struck me the way the Broken Spoke has, and few things have left me so conflicted.

The conflict is a familiar one. I grew up a queer person in an unaccepting community with an unaccepting family. Something had to give once my psychiatric disability—bipolar disorder, untreated

at the time—began causing risk-taking behavior in my teens. That's when I told my family, to their disgust and vitriol, I was gay. After days of my father shouting Bible verses at me and a string of mental-illness-related self-harm, I was committed to a psych ward in Denton my senior year of high school.

Part of my excitement for moving to Austin was this idea that I could finally fit in and find queer camaraderie. I never had a partner in Oklahoma, and any of my intimate ventures were confined to Oak Lawn and various queer enclaves north of Dallas, a reasonable 1.5-hour drive south from home. I have always dressed distinctly straight, and I've never had an inflection in my voice that would give me away. When I moved to Austin, I wanted to forge my own community to make up for the friendship, family, and romance I'd been missing out on. The reality has been different and more complicated than I expected. Instead of abandoning my country roots, I've been seeking them out.

These roots still exist in the city despite rapid urbanization, outstretched beneath the edifices of new Austin and the influx of capital flowing into the downtown core. The oak tree outside the Broken Spoke has been there since long before White opened his place back in the '60s, when that part of South Austin was merely pastureland. The hip South Lamar apartments standing tall over the red, haphazardly constructed honky-tonk make it seem as out of place as a donkey at a horse race. It's hard not to feel the sentiment of how Austin is losing what makes it Austin. That's what I think about one hazy night while smoking and gazing at the old oak that looks more like a rendering than an actual living organism.

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Since I was young, I've molded myself into an acceptable kind of masculinity. I wrestled with my guy friends, dressed in muted colors, and learned to speak with a deep tone whether addressing my peers and superiors or in prayer. In my adulthood, masculinity is a script I've memorized. It's the way of expressing myself that feels the most comfortable, and it adds a layer of security to my day-to-day social life. It's earned me a privilege I didn't realize I had until I started dating my ex-boyfriend, who is considerably more effeminate than me.

I met him, my first and only partner since leaving Oklahoma, through a mutual friend. We hit it off dangerously fast. It was the kind of infatuation I fantasized about in high school, the kind where we said "I love you" after knowing each other only two weeks. We

bouldered at the same gym. We traveled to New York during Pride weekend. We spent almost every hour of every day together from when we first met until the day we broke up. The whole time, I wanted to love all over him, even in public. Through the course of our relationship, I learned more about my own privilege as a straight-passing gay man. I saw his guardedness when we talked to each other or showed any kind of affection out in the open. That is simply not on my mind most of the time, although I've had some close calls.

Two years ago, a fellow queer schoolmate and I made a trip to a bar in East Austin. I decided to put a spin on the Western look by wearing a pink cowboy hat an Okie friend gave me for Christmas. At the end of a long, crowded line, the bouncer, a tall guy with his own cowboy

hat, accosted me. "What the hell are you doing with that pink cowboy hat?" he demanded. "You're appropriating my culture." Clearly upset with what he interpreted as posturing, I turned his attention to the state on my ID. "I'm from Oklahoma," I said. "It's my culture as much as it is yours." I didn't let it faze me that night, but the subtext was clear.

Any fear I thought would be assuaged by moving to Austin lingers in many of my out-and-proud encounters. I've opted back to masculine dress most of the time, sticking with Wranglers, Carhartt shirts, and trucker hats. At the Spoke, I'll wear a pearl-snap shirt and my ostrich-leather boots and a non-pink Stetson. My voice is low, and my mannerisms are masculine. My legs are never crossed, and my hands, if they move in conversation, swing wide and forcefully. I don't tell anyone at the bars I study queer communities for my doctorate program. When my female roommate joins me on a night out, we pretend to be a hetero couple. Just for kicks, of course. It's nice to move through the world without fear that a man will shout at me for some masculine infraction, for being a threat to his or my or all men's manhood.

The one discreet giveaway I allow myself every now and then is painting the nails on my left hand in black polish. Sometimes it's not as discreet as I'd like. At a dive spot in a strip mall in Pflugerville, a broad-shouldered man with a thick black beard asked me if I sold drugs. I asked him why he thought I had drugs to sell him, and he told me it was because of my nails.

Despite my enthusiasm for the Spoke, I've had rough encounters there, too. One bartender, an older woman who I haven't seen working there in months, noticed my nails and was suspicious. To deflect, I replied, "My girlfriend likes me to paint them." She countered, "Oh, does she make you wear lingerie, too?"

I now dress full cowboy for the Spoke to blend in and because it feels good. My friend calls my cowboy wear "drag." She says it as a joke, but there's truth to it. Drag refers to the practice of creating

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The conflict of being a queer person in a non-queer world will never be fully resolved for me, but at the Broken Spoke I enjoy strumming that tension like a guitar.

characters invented by, usually, gay men, some you may have seen on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. These men dress as drag "queens" in a ludicrous parody of femininity. Through gender-bending performances, they challenge widespread ideas of masculinity by showing the slippery nature of how presentation through manner and dress affects perception. For those unaware of the performance, they may not even identify these men as *men*. Don't get me wrong: My cowboy wear indicates a piece of me that's sincere. At the Broken Spoke, I'm not engaging in parody. I'm doing this for real and playing my part in the overall honky-tonk vibe. It is play, though, in a certain sense. It's a performance of a piece of my past I want to embody in my present.

This jives well with the Spoke's atmosphere. One night, I approached a table with two young ladies who had just bought their first drinks. I asked one if she wanted to dance and she politely declined. Her friend's interest was piqued, however, and she said she wanted to dance with me but didn't know how. I led her out onto the dance floor bathed in lights, her long hair flowing in the wind of all the fans. I showed her the steps, and she really struggled with it, but I told her it was OK. I asked if she wanted to spin, and she nodded, so I twirled her. Then twirled her again. And again. I watched other men engage in the same steps as me, in the same clothes, and in the same space.

Another night, I chatted with a middle-aged man from rural Arizona. I asked him

how he liked the place, and he told me in his parts the Broken Spoke was regular fare. I told him I felt the same way, and that's why I liked coming here. He asked where I was from. "Durant," I said, "Oklahoma." He replied, "Ah, y'all grow a lot of peanuts out there." Exactly right, at least back in the day. Now, the lawn in front of City Hall features a statue representative of the "World's Largest Peanut"—which was never grown there, by the way. But the recognition felt good, a shared connection to the place and how it related to our backgrounds.

These days, I'm all about the Broken Spoke: the music, the dress, the dancing. It's where I can fit in. The honky-tonk offers two-stepping lessons to those new to the art. I like to get there early on the weekends to hear the teacher—the late founder's daughter, Terri White—instruct the beginners. She gives little speeches about the glory of the Broken Spoke, Texas culture, and her father, of whom she always speaks so highly.

One evening, to a crowd of a few dozen couples learning in the dance hall, she stated plainly that the men in attendance would never measure up to her dad. She explained that he was so many things: a great father, fiercely passionate about the things he loved, and strongly accepting of people from all walks of life, races, and sexual orientations. He was a real man by her construction, not merely tolerant but voracious in his appetite for new people no matter their differences.

Armed with this knowledge, I feel buoyed in my continuing love affair with the Spoke. It's country in the way I want country to be—authentic in its roots and progressive in its ideals. By going there, queer people may be able to reconnect with a piece of their small-town upbringing. The conflict of being a queer person in a non-queer world will never be fully resolved for me, but at the Broken Spoke I enjoy strumming that tension like a guitar.

My rural origins are a feature of myself I can never let go of, even if I tried. When

I drive up Interstate 35 and cross over to US 75 in Dallas, then through the fields of Melissa, Van Alstyne, and Howe, eventually crossing the Red River bridge back to Oklahoma, I bring that part of myself back. When I drive through Austin and move among its people, I likewise bring my Oklahoma self to those spaces, too. Negotiating my queerness and my country roots is no longer the chore it was when I was younger. Now, I endeavor through this ongoing conflict with optimism. It's a whiskey-bent evening at the honky-tonk, a conversation with disillusioned country folk in the throes of urban life, a longing gaze into the eyes of a lover. It's a song I two-step to, a cheap beer I drink to get buzzed, the butt of a cigarette I toss into the sand-filled bucket by the door before going back inside for one more dance. **L**

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DRIVE



BOB AND KELLI
Phillips parade around
Waxahachie during the Texas
Country Reporter Festival.



Hop In and Travel

Bob Phillips' *Texas Country Reporter* rambles into its 50th year of chronicling everyday living

By Michael J. Mooney

A blind painter in Denton. A third-generation hatter in Brookshire. A 93-year-old oil equipment mechanic in Odessa who makes women's clothing in her spare time. These are Bob Phillips' people. He calls them "ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

Phillips has spent the last five decades crisscrossing Texas, exploring little-known places, eating in tiny diners, and highlighting people you'd probably never hear about but for his independently produced TV show, *Texas Country Reporter*. Since the 1970s, Phillips—in that deep, friendly baritone—has invited his audience to "hop in and travel" with him. And over the years he's driven more than 3 million miles. He's been to every county, every town, driven on practically every paved road in Texas.

"That's all just the getting-there stuff," Phillips says. "It's really about meeting all these people and hearing their stories."

Sometimes it's the story of siblings who sell peas from a roadside pickup truck while serenading customers with delightful bluegrass. Sometimes it's a high school football concession stand that's also the town's only restaurant.

Phillips captures authentic scenes of small-town life. Where the rest of the world might see unworthy blue-collar Americans, Phillips sees survivors who work with their hands and spin accidental poetry from their hearts. Phillips begins most segments of his show with a glimpse of the subject at work: someone painting or mowing or sawing. He narrates with simple, declarative sentences. And the stories veer quickly into something bigger. Each episode has three segments, and every three- to nine-minute tale becomes an uplifting look at humanity.

Though Phillips travels constantly, *Texas Country Reporter*, which airs on different channels around the state, isn't a travel show. And while it often highlights individuals who create incredible things, it's not a how-to show either. The undercurrent of the stories Phillips tells is passion—he wants to know why



FROM LEFT: Bob and Kelli Phillips host *Texas Country Reporter*, segment producer Brian Hawkins at the Ellis County Courthouse.

people do what they do.

"I want to know how others live," Phillips says. "I've always had to know that."

This inquisitiveness and desire to chronicle regular people have turned Phillips into a Texas institution. Strangers wave when they see his red, white, and blue Ford Expedition rolling down the highway. Every October, the program's fans show up for food, music, and storytelling at his annual Texas Country Reporter Festival in Waxahachie. The first episode of his 50th season, which aired last fall, opened with well wishes from Gov. Greg Abbott. Phillips released a memoir, *A Good Long Drive*, to coincide with the new season, and the two blurbs on the back are by legendary Texans Dan Rather and Nolan Ryan.

"Reading this book is like riding in the

This inquisitiveness and desire to chronicle regular people have turned Phillips into a Texas institution.

van with Bob and the crew of TCR on their way to another surprising story," Ryan's quote says. "It's the perfect behind-the-scenes companion to one of the best TV shows in Texas."

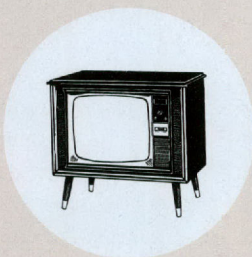
Texas Country Reporter is considered the longest-running independently produced TV show in U.S. history. And the host is as invigorated by the stories he finds as he's ever been. So why has

Phillips dedicated the last five decades to living this way? Sitting in his house in Dallas, Phillips squints and purses his lips. He's not used to being on this side of the questions.

"My curiosity is much bigger than the area where I was born and where I live, I guess," he says.

Phillips was born with an insatiable wanderlust. He grew up in East Dallas, where his father worked hard running a service station. The elder Phillips had been a farmer when he lost his left arm in an accident. He tried to continue farming, but it was too hard, and he moved to the city near the end of World War II.

Phillips' mother always wanted something better than they had. Though Bob



Three Sides of Bob

Episodes of *Texas Country Reporter* air on Saturdays and Sundays year-round on local affiliates in every market in Texas, as well as nationwide on the cable channel RFD-TV.

Bob Phillips' new memoir, *A Good Long Drive*, recounts his childhood up through decades of producing the show and festival, including encounters with Willie Nelson and Tom Landry.

Throughout 2022, Bob and Kelli Phillips will perform with symphonies across the state as part of "A Texas Tribute," featuring songs and stories about the show and culture of the state.

For more information, visit texascountryreporter.com.

THE PHILLIPSES tell the stories of "ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

and his older brother, Bill, grew up poor, it was important to her they know which fork to use at a fancy dinner. Phillips went to school in a big city, but he spent weekends and summers on his aunt's farm, with chickens and cows and an old horse named Easter Bud. When his father took long drives in the country, the boy sat next to him in the cab of the old Studebaker—not over by the window, right there by his dad's side—and they'd sing gospel songs.

His idyllic world shattered when he was a teenager and his parents divorced after more than 20 years of marriage. One night his mom and dad argued over a shotgun, and it went off, blowing a hole in the hallway ceiling. The next day, the parents of his high school girlfriend invited Phillips to move in with them.

He went to Southern Methodist University in Dallas and studied broadcast journalism like his hero, CBS newsman Charles Kuralt. While Phillips was still in college, he started working for Channel 4, the local CBS affiliate at the time. He covered crime, sports, and politics—he

was a control room producer during the 1984 Republican National Convention, while his brother, a prominent political operative, sat next to Ronald Reagan—but he preferred the feature packages.

The show that would become *Texas Country Reporter* started in 1972 and was initially called *4 Country Reporter*. The concept was the same: a reporter and a cameraman in a van, driving around the state and interviewing interesting people they found. Phillips contributed to the show since its inception and took over as host in 1973, when the first host was arrested on drug charges.

Phillips tried to do stories in the style of Kuralt, focusing on regular working people while revealing larger truths about the world. For years, the ratings were high, and the station reduced his "hard news" responsibilities. But after 14 years, Channel 4 canceled the show in 1986.

Undeterred, Phillips started producing the show himself, with his own production company, and renamed it. This allowed him to sell *Texas Country Reporter* to stations in every market in

the state—and some in Louisiana. In North Texas, the show started airing on Channel 4's rival, WFAA on Channel 8.

Like so many of the historic Texans he's heard about while traveling the state, Phillips became his own kind of pioneer. "Without him trailblazing the path, I'm not sure *The Daytripper* would exist," says Chet Garner, host of the Texas travel show airing on PBS. "When I was first pitching the show, I would tell people, 'It's sort of like *Texas Country Reporter* but with a lot more barbecue and costumes.'"

Early in the show's history, Phillips was in Corpus Christi interviewing sculptor Kent Ullberg. A native of Sweden, Ullberg makes monumental art. Phillips was on Ullberg's boat in the bay, looking at some of the sculptures along the water, when he asked the artist, "Why do you do this?"

"I remember he just kind of stared off into the distance while he was driving his boat," Phillips says. "He turned back to me and said, 'Bob, I would do this even if it was illegal.'"

That's how Phillips feels about making

When Bob and Kelli embark on a new adventure, they have a ritual. Upon climbing into the Expedition, they sing the Willie Nelson song "On the Road Again."

his show. About cruising the backroads and stopping at points of interest. When he's been home for too long, he can feel the call of the road. Producing the show doesn't always make for an easy life. During Phillips' heavy travel season, he's gone for six or seven days at a time, about half the year. There's always another story out there, always some excuse to drive to Big Bend or Amarillo or to a bird sanctuary in McAllen. He's had a few divorces over the years as a result.

"It's not easy being married to

somebody who does what I do," he says.

In 2007, he married Kelli Lee, an anchor at a TV station in Beaumont. By 2015, he convinced her to quit, hit the road with him, and co-host *Texas Country Reporter*. They often report stories together, and they take turns narrating. Now, when each episode starts, Bob and Kelli smile and invite the viewer to "hop in and travel" with them together.

"Leaving hard news wasn't easy," Kelli says. "But the stories that we do, about unsung heroes around the state, they're just as important."

When Bob and Kelli embark on a new adventure, they have a ritual. Upon climbing into the Expedition, they sing the Willie Nelson song "On the Road Again."

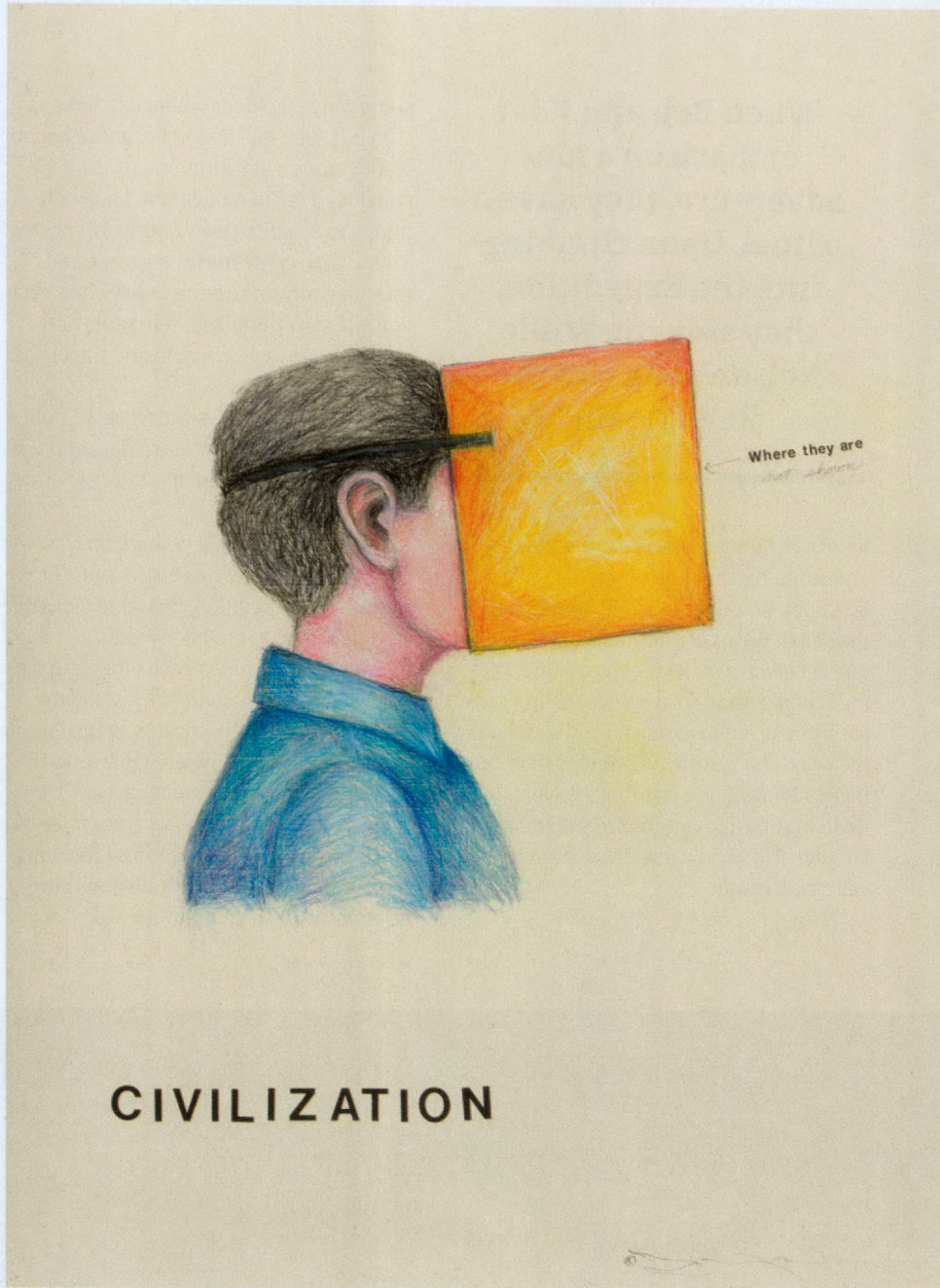
"That's our signal to each other," he says. "Well, here we go again. We just did this, and now we're out doing this again. I'm heading out. I know where I'm headed. I may or may not get there today."

He pauses and flashes the warm smile he's beamed into Texas living rooms for so long.

"Because what if we find something else really interesting on the way?"

FROM LEFT: The show's Texas-themed Ford Expedition; production assistant Abigail Adams at the festival.





What's in a Song?

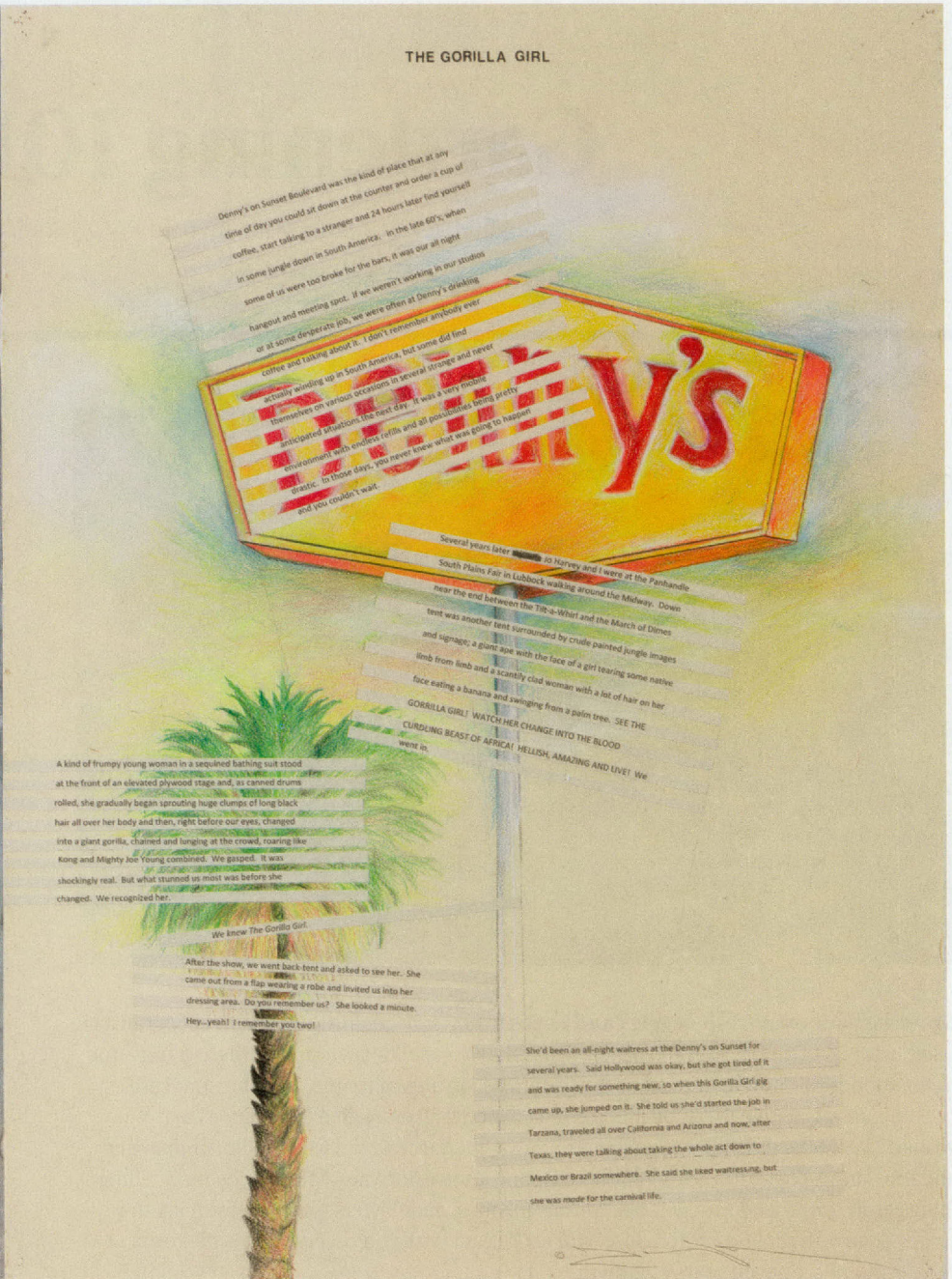
Musician and visual artist Terry Allen picks apart his work in a concert and an exhibition

By Jonny Auping

Terry Allen has always been curious about where his songs come from. "There's still such a mystery to how they just weren't there one minute and then they begin to be there the next minute," Allen said in October, just a few days after performing at the Austin City Limits Hall of Fame induction of Wilco, Lucinda Williams, and Alejandro Escovedo.

Raised in Lubbock in the 1950s before

attending art school in Los Angeles in the mid-'60s, Allen has been a prolific musician and visual artist for decades. He has recorded 13 albums of original songs that helped pioneer the alt-country genre. This includes the critically praised 1975 narrative concept album *Juarez*, which details the journeys of two couples from Southern California who cross paths in Colorado, resulting in murder. His 1979 album *Lubbock (On Everything)* is a penetrating look




at Panhandle life. His visual art, meanwhile, ranges from sculpture, to paintings and drawings, to video installations and live performance art. Institutions including the New York Museum of Modern Art, New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Contemporary Austin, and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth own his work.

His newest exhibition, an evolving work titled *Terry Allen: MemWars*, is on display at the Blanton Museum of

Art in Austin through July 10. Allen and his wife, the actor, writer, and artist Jo Harvey Allen, created a video installation of themselves telling stories and attempting to unravel the origins of his songs. Like how his childhood memories of seeing tattoos on his uncles who served in World War II informed his first understandings of visual art. The songs and stories are accompanied by collage texts and a multitude of drawings (above). "It's kind of a sprawl," Allen said,

"a landscape of stories and a landscape of songs that come out of one another."

MemWars will coincide with a concert titled *Civilization* at the Paramount Theatre in Austin on Jan. 15 that will in some ways dovetail with the exhibition. "Visual art and music have always informed one another so closely for me," Allen said. "I've never regarded them as anything but the same thing." For more information, visit blantonmuseum.org and austintheatre.org. 

Gardening 101

Tips and tricks to start your own Texas garden

By June Naylor



Growing your own fresh veggies and herbs is not only healthy but also deeply gratifying. Luckily for us in Texas, we can garden with relative ease for several months at a time due to the moderate climate in most of the state. The key lies in ample planning and care.

“I encourage people to try, be it herbs on a windowsill or a patch of tomatoes in the ground,” says Marcus Bridgewater, better known as “Garden Marcus,” a TikTok influencer and the Spring-based CEO of wellness company Choice Forward. “There’s joy in watching things grow, from seed to vegetable, sprouts to vines, and flowers to fruit. Observing the stages of growth reminds us to appreciate each plant we eat, as everything is the result of weeks, months, or even years of growth.”

In addition to a more wholesome appreciation of where your food comes from, gardening grants great stress relief. It provides a rooting in nature and an alternative to our technology-filled routines. It’s not too expensive, either: While it takes money to build a garden, the cost of growing your own tomatoes is pennies on the dollar compared to grocery store costs. And homegrown organic veggies and herbs are far more nutritious because they can be picked ripe. Your most significant investment, at the end of the day, is time.

Good Day Sunshine

Your garden’s supply of sun and shade will dictate what and where you should plant. If you have full sun all day long, you’ll need to install shade cloth in places for plants that don’t need more than six hours of full sun.

Lots of Sun:

- Beans and peas
- Cantaloupe
- Cucumber
- Eggplant
- Okra
- Oregano
- Peppers
- Rosemary
- Basil
- Tomatoes
- Zucchini

Part Sun, Part Shade:

- Beets
- Cabbage
- Greens (collard, mustard, kale)
- Lettuce
- Radishes
- Spinach
- Turnips
- Rutabaga

Bumper Crop

Water in the morning, and water daily in summer. Soaker hoses are helpful tools.

Don’t overdo the fertilizer; it can overwhelm and kill plants.

Use neem oil, a biological pest control for aphids and other pests, the moment you see the first pest.

Monitor for lizards, spiders, lady bugs, and praying mantis, all signs of a healthy biome.

Try companion planting, such as surrounding tomatoes with marigolds to deter pests.

Install some variety of shade cloth to combat long hours of sun and heat.

1/2 in.

Depth at which to plant kale and collard green seeds

50-70

Days it takes a cucumber plant to mature

6 ft.

Average height of an okra plant

A Time to Grow

Texas' vast size means growing seasons vary greatly from the Red River to the Rio Grande Valley. Consult growing charts for your zone with resources from your local feed store and the region's Master Gardener organization. *The Old Farmer's Almanac* offers planting dates by zip code. almanac.com



Six Feet Above

If planting right in the ground, plan to spend a year tilling the soil with organic matter first; much of Texas' soil is rich in clay, which doesn't allow for good root-soaking. Raised beds offer a faster alternative. With a cinder block, cedar plank, or fieldstone base, these planters are relatively easy to build. Cardboard, newspaper, or hardware cloth can be placed at the bottom of the beds to prevent weeds. Then, fill with garden soil and get to planting.



Soup's On

RATATOUILLE

Recipe by June Naylor
Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients:

3 Japanese eggplants
1 zucchini
1 yellow squash
1 green bell pepper
1 red bell pepper
1 yellow onion
1 to 2 cloves garlic
1 to 2 jalapeños, seeded (optional)
4 to 6 Roma tomatoes, depending on size
2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil
3 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs, such as basil, oregano, thyme
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Dice the eggplant, zucchini, squash, bell peppers, and onion into 1/2-inch pieces. Mince the garlic and jalapeños (if using). Cut tomatoes into quarters.

Warm 1 tablespoon olive oil in large skillet and saute eggplant, squash, peppers, onion, garlic, and jalapeños together over medium heat, stirring to cook evenly. Add olive oil if mixture seems dry.

After about 5 minutes, add tomatoes and stir well. Lower heat to simmer and cover, cooking gently for about 30 minutes.

Add chopped herbs, salt and pepper to taste, and stir again, continuing to simmer another 5 minutes. Adjust seasonings. and serve as a side to a meat dish, or as a main course with your favorite crusty bread or over polenta or saffron rice.



Desert Oasis

There's more to Midland than oil and gas

By Julia Jones

While the oil and gas industry dominates Midland's economy and culture—and permeates it with that familiar sulfuric smell—there are also plenty of sites that cater to casual travelers. Midland was originally a stop on the Texas and Pacific Railway and derived its name from its location between Fort Worth and El Paso. After prospectors discovered oil there in the '40s, the population boomed. Even though it's in the semiarid Permian Basin, plant and animal life thrive here. Midland also serves as a gateway to other West Texas adventures: The Midland International Air and Space Port is the closest commercial airport to Big Bend.

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2



1



3



4



2



1 / I-20 WILDLIFE PRESERVE

Master naturalists helped curate an interpretive trail through this 100-acre riparian forest around a playa lake. Read about plants along the trail, view monarch butterflies during their fall migration, and attend wildlife education sessions.



2 / MUSEUM OF THE SOUTHWEST

Set in the 1937 Turner Mansion, this museum features rotating exhibits by local and non-local artists: a planetarium, a children's museum; a sculpture garden; and a collection of Kentucky Derby memorabilia.



3 / DORIS J'S KITCHEN

This local dining institution, named after the owners' grandmother, serves up some of Doris' recipes for hearty soul food: fried chicken and catfish, oxtail, and smothered pork chops with plenty of sides like mac and cheese.



4 / GEORGE W. BUSH CHILDHOOD HOME

Learn about the upbringing of the nation's 43rd president with an informative tour of his childhood home, where he lived 1951-55, starting when he was 5. Little George's bedroom is a highlight, as is the operational 1950s refrigerator.



5 / TACO DIVINO

This trendy cash-and-Venmo-only joint features tacos like the Frenchy, filled with duck confit, alongside classics like the Holy Pastor, filled with thinly sliced pork shoulder. Order with a frozen sangria and a side of *elotes*—Mexican corn.



6 / MICRO MARKET

Located downtown, the shopping complex features storefronts by small businesses selling everything from jewelry to home goods to tasty treats. Frequent street markets and short-term store rentals ensure no two shopping trips are the same.



7 / CENTENNIAL PARK

Midland's newly redeveloped downtown centers on this 4-acre park with a splash pad, dog parks, and a large outdoor movie screen. Picnic on the site of the old Midland County Courthouse, which stood here until it was demolished in 2017.



8 / HORSESHOE LODGES

Among Midland's chain hotels, travelers will find more distinctive accommodations at one of these cabins (starting at \$68/night), which feature wood-paneled walls and rustic décor. There is a shared game room and an adjoining RV park. 📍



Liquid Gold

Pumpjacks dot the flat landscape of Midland, signs of its most prominent industry. Midland is one of the largest oil producers in the world, as the Permian Basin Petroleum Museum's interactive exhibits showcase. But the city is also preparing for the future by investing in renewable energy. In 2010, Midland-based companies partnered with Texas Tech University to create the National Institute of Renewable Energy in Lubbock to study the integration of solar and wind energy into the electric grid, paving a path forward for the region's fossil fuel-based economy.

petroleummuseum.org;
groupnire.com

Midland RV Park, across the street from I-20 Wildlife Preserve, offers hookups to the city's water and sewer, access to free showers, a fitness room, an on-site store for RV essentials, and even a dog-washing station. 2134 S. Midland Drive. 432-697-0801; midlandrvpark.com

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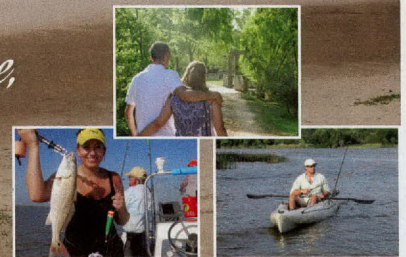
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A DECADE AFTER
THE COMPLEX
FIRE, BASTROP
IS HEALING—
AND ARTISTS,
BIG-CITY DWELLERS,
AND HOLLYWOOD
ARE TAKING NOTE

By
DINA GACHMAN
Photographs by
MELANIE GRIZZEL

BASTROP

FIRST

CAUGHT

my attention in 2013, when I saw its burned out, ash-covered landscape in the David Gordon Green film *Prince Avalanche*. It's an oddball story about two highway workers, played by Emile Hirsch and Paul Rudd, who spend a summer painting lines along a country road destroyed by a wildfire. The backdrop was no Hollywood set. It was the Lost Pines of Bastrop after the catastrophic 2011 Complex Fire, the largest wildfire in Texas history. From Sept. 4 to Oct. 29, the fire burned roughly 33,000 acres. I knew about it from the news and from friends, but the movie captured my imagination. It made me curious about this Central Texas town I'd passed by so many times while growing up in Houston and road-tripping to Austin.

The recovery is still a work in progress, though. As of fall 2021, over 6.5 million pine seedlings have been planted on public and private lands, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service. Right after the fire, "it looked like an apocalyptic landscape," says Chris Hrasky, drummer for the Austin-based instrumental rock band Explosions in the Sky. Hrasky had brought Green to Bastrop so he could see the potential shooting location for himself, and when Green scanned the charcoal-colored pines, he was sold. Explosions in the Sky ended up scoring *Prince Avalanche*, which now serves as a time capsule of what Bastrop looked like in May 2012, less than a year after the fire was finally put out.

Around that time, Hrasky, who lives in Austin, started hiking the hilly trails near the banks of the Colorado River and noticing wildflowers and ground cover sprouting through the ash. He's been a devotee of exploring Bastrop State Park—6,600 acres of trails, fishing spots, and picnic areas—with his dog ever since. "Hiking in Austin is fine, but there are people everywhere," Hrasky says. "Bastrop feels like a nice escape, and that's becoming increasingly necessary."

Back in 2011, the Texas Film Commission designated Bastrop a Film Friendly Texas community, meaning the city and county work with the commission to market the



OPENING SPREAD:

Kate Rousett and Sonya Cote at Store House Market + Eatery. **CLOCKWISE**

FROM LEFT: Ryan and Samantha Holiday inside The Painted Porch; the patio at 602 Brewing Company; a Little Free Library at 1109 Pecan Street.

area to the movie industry. Filmmakers like Richard Linklater, who bought a 48-acre ranch in Bastrop County prior to the fire, and the original *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* director, Tobe Hooper, understood its cinematic potential years before the designation. The Bastrop gas station from Hooper's movie is now a tourist destination for horror fans.

The burgeoning film community, in tandem with big-city dwellers looking for small town living, has helped catalyze Bastrop's triumphant return from the Complex Fire. In 2000, the town, located 30 miles east of Austin, was home to just over 5,000 residents. Now its population tops 9,000. Not even the pandemic has been a deterrent. "Tourism is alive and well in Bastrop," says Ashton LaFuente, director of marketing at Visit Bastrop. LaFuente says at least 10 new hospitality businesses have opened in town since the pandemic, and the September 2021 Bastrop

Music Festival, an economic driver for the community, saw a record-breaking year.

BASTROP WAS ESTABLISHED in 1832 by Stephen F. Austin and named after Baron de Bastrop, a colorful Dutch character whose noble origins are questionable, but whose contributions to settling the area earned him dibs. In 1834, the Mexican government renamed the town Mina after the Mexican Revolutionary hero Francisco Xavier Mina. When the town was incorporated under the laws of the Republic of Texas in 1837, the name was changed back to Bastrop.

Floods and fires have ravaged the area since it was established, but it has always bounced back, and Bastrop now bills itself as the "Most Historic Small Town in Texas." The





claim is buoyed by the abundance of historical buildings that attract visitors to downtown. The National Register of Historic Places lists 34 buildings in Bastrop's commercial district, many of them dating to the mid-1800s. The buildings that now house a record store and restaurants were once cathouses and shops that made pressed metal cornices. The original businesses might not exist anymore, but the structures have persisted through natural disasters and decades of growth and change.

"We've had our share of catastrophes," says Dock Jackson, a fifth-generation Bastropian who met me at a no-fuss café called Coffee Dog, across the river and a few miles from Main Street. Jackson is involved with just about every association imaginable, including the Bastrop MLK Scholarship Committee, the Kerr Community Center board of directors, and the Juneteenth Committee. He's also served over 26 years on the city council, helped name streets, and fought for arts programs. He knows everyone in town.

Like Bastrop, Jackson is laid-back and friendly. After he picks up his fancy coffee drink, he heads back to the barista to ask for just a little more sugar. He tells me that in his younger years he did leave Bastrop for a time. He headed to New York to pursue his dream of becoming an actor and singer. He was keeping pace in the city, but then his grandfather had a stroke and Jackson returned home to care for him.

Jackson has spearheaded creative endeavors in Bastrop for decades. This was long before Hollywood actors



including *Shazam's* Zachary Levi and *Entourage's* Adrian Grenier abandoned California and moved to the area in search of artistic inspiration and a new start. Levi is trying to establish Wyldwood Studios, an arts commune on the outskirts of town. Jackson, who has watched the growth of Bastrop's entertainment industry for decades, tells me the Kerr Community Center on Walnut Street was "the only place African Americans could go for cultural events" during the Jim Crow era.

Like so many buildings in Bastrop, the Kerr building is



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Astro Record Store owner Kevin Mawby; Maxine's Cafe in downtown; Dock Jackson at the Kerr Community Center; Hannibal Lokumbe under the pedestrian bridge; Fisherman's Park along the Colorado River.

now on the National Register of Historic Places. Bastrop has over 130 historical buildings, and to the town's credit, instead of razing those old homes and red brick buildings, they've welcomed a crop of newcomers who've been turning those unused dusty spaces into independent bookstores, boutiques, and farm-to-table restaurants.

While not everyone is happy about the massive changes Bastrop is experiencing, Jackson is all for the growth. "We can't stay stagnant," he says. "And there's less and less reason to go to Austin."

PEOPLE AREN'T JUST STOPPING INTO BASTROP these days. They're moving there to play music or paint or open a restaurant in a place that's attempting to maintain its small town quaintness even as its population explodes with artists who've been won over by it.

The roads out of Austin and into small town life lured bestselling author Ryan Holiday and his wife, Samantha. They moved to Austin from New York in 2015 and started raising "gateway animals" like chickens and goats. After a few years watching the traffic slow and the construction speed up, they started questioning why they were in a city at all.

"GIVEN
THE RIVER AND THE TREES AND THE
PROXIMITY TO [MAJOR CITIES], BASTROP'S
THE PERFECT PLACE."

"We thought, if we're going to live in Texas, let's *live in Texas*," says Holiday, a native Californian, as we sit on a shaded porch behind his bookstore, The Painted Porch. "The draw to Texas was Austin, but we realized we didn't have to live there."

The Holidays bought 40 acres in Cedar Creek, an area in Bastrop County just outside of town, and made the risky move of opening a brick-and-mortar bookstore during a pandemic. "We put down serious roots," he says when I ask whether he plans to stay for good.

As you might expect by now, The Painted Porch is housed in a building that's part of the National Register of Historic Places. On a blazing hot day in late June, Holiday gives me a tour of his 140-year-old red brick building at 912 Main St. The books on sale are carefully curated. Samantha's piano from childhood is in the middle of the main floor, and a tower of books rises above an old fireplace. More than 2,000 books, 4,000 nails, and a couple of gallons of glue went into the tower, which stretches to the ceiling. Holiday displays the better books closer to eye-level and the less interesting books (think something like a 1978 celebrity diet book) higher up.

For native Bastropians who are skeptical of all the growth, Holiday and his young family might represent the next generation of outsiders who are flooding into their town, bringing tourists with them. The Holidays' love for Bastrop is palpable, though, and their aim, just like Jackson's, is to preserve the integrity of the town while helping it thrive into the future. Holiday cites the Colorado River, which is easily accessible for kayaking and fishing just steps from downtown, as one of the perks of living and working in the area.

Holiday thinks Bastrop has a "Mayberry feel," referencing the idyllic fictional town from *The Andy Griffith Show*. The Holidays recently took over Tracey's Drive-In Grocery, along with Athan and AnneMarie Schindler. The beloved spot was owned and operated by the Chalmers family since 1946, and they handed the reins to the Holidays and Schindlers because, as they indicate on the business' website, they trust them to keep the store operating as the same independent shop locals adore.

Holiday is quick to point me to other small businesses he loves. He touts Maxine's Cafe, which is located right across Main Street from his bookstore and is consistently ranked one of the best breakfast places in Texas. He takes me next door to Astro Record Store, owned by British transplant Kevin "Lippy" Mawby, and rhapsodizes about the classic LPs, vintage record players, and historic wood-carved countertops. A few days before I met with Holiday, The Painted Porch and Astro Record Store hosted an event with famed English DJ Paul Oakenfold, now a Bastrop resident.



"PEOPLE
GO TO AUSTIN TO WORK, BUT THEY
COME TO BASTROP TO TRULY LIVE."
"

ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT IN BASTROP, you can see a three-piece country band at 602 Brewing Company, or check out local artists' galleries, or stroll through Fisherman's Park and admire the Colorado River. You can cool down with a sweet tea and a Cubano sandwich at Base Camp Deli, visit the Lost Pines Art Center, or wander along Pecan and Elm streets snapping photos of the historical homes. On Saturday nights there's a vibrancy that isn't hampered by endlessly searching for parking spots or waiting in long lines to get into restaurants or bars. On weekdays, Main Street still has that Mayberry quality. It's quiet, but if you just put one foot in front of the other you're bound to stumble upon something interesting.

Like so many places in Texas that are having the charm bulldozed right out of them, the worry is that all this growth will lead to more cookie-cutter developments and less hometown feel. Classical composer and jazz trumpeter Hannibal Lokumbe, who grew up 20 minutes away in



CLOCKWISE
FROM LEFT: Duffy and Dick Smith at their residence; Live Again health market, a shopping area off the main strip.





JUST EAST OF WEIRD

THIRTY MILES OUTSIDE OF AUSTIN, opportunities to eat, play, and sleep in style are still abundant

A staple of downtown Bastrop, **Maxine's Cafe** is a must-stop for *migas*, chicken-fried steak, and homemade pecan pie. 905 Main St., 512-303-0919; maxinescafe.com

Lost Pines Art Center hosts glass-blowing workshops, exhibits, and events like Art After Dark, with live music and wine. 1204 Chestnut St., 512-321-8055; lostpinesartcenter.org

Less than 4 miles from downtown, **The Reserve at Greenleaf** is an eco-friendly "glamping" paradise offering luxury yurts, hiking trails, and kayaking. 408 Laura Lane, 512-988-9928; thereserveatgreenleaf.com

Smithville and now calls Bastrop home, is torn.

"I'm in the middle ground," Lokumbe says. "The world is for all of us to share. Given the river and the trees and the proximity to Houston and San Antonio and Austin, it's the perfect place."

The big question is, how will that change with the introduction of a 546-acre film studio? In June, the Bastrop City Council approved a development agreement with a California-based company—a project unrelated to Wyldwood—amid plenty of resistance by locals whose homes would be impacted by the noise, light, and invasion of actors like Will Smith or Angelina Jolie jetting into town. When I meet with Mayor Connie Schroeder in her office at Bastrop City Hall on Chestnut Street, she proudly shows me the plans for the studio and says, "It's a business deal for us." She reminds me that Bastrop is a Film Friendly Texas town, and the infrastructure impact of the studio is less than what had been previously suggested by a developer for 1,200 homes. "Change is hard," Schroeder says.

Michele Anderson, who heads up opposition to the studio, lives in the neighborhood adjacent to the proposed development. "In our view, it's not beneficial to the community," she says. Anderson cites the fact that the plans include hotels, restaurants, and entertainment on the lot, which would theoretically keep tourists from frequenting local businesses in town. Like many people, Anderson left Austin because of



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Live-music venue Neighbor's Kitchen & Yard; Lauren Martinez outside of Tough Cookie Bakery; bronze sculptures by Deep in the Heart Art Foundry.

the rapid changes, and seeing that same trend in Bastrop gives her pause. "We're slowly losing who we are," she says.

Jessica Zamora, who works alongside Anderson and lives in Tahitian Village, near the proposed site, worries about the studio's impact on wildlife and her neighborhood. "I do feel it's growing a little bit too fast," Zamora says. "I really wanted it to stay small."

Jackson, one of the city council members who voted in favor of the studio, says it will add to Bastrop's "beautiful mix of old and new."

Chefs Sonya Cote and Kate Rousset left Austin for Bastrop to open Store House Market + Eatery and Eden East Farm in, yep, a historical building that over the years housed a Mexican restaurant, a funeral home, and a brothel, according to Carol Kysar of the Bastrop County Historical Society. Cote says of the changes coming into Bastrop, "I'm a little worried about it because we watched Austin explode, and we couldn't afford to stick around. I hope the city of Bastrop puts a lot of thought into the expansion."

Perry Lowe, a native Bastropian and drummer for the roots band Chubby Knuckle Choir, understands the allure of his hometown. "People go to Austin to work, but they come to Bastrop to truly live," he explains.

AS SOMEONE WHO RECENTLY LEFT CITY LIFE to settle in the rural yet rapidly growing area of Hutto, I understand the conundrum as I've watched Austin's authenticity take a hit while it makes way for more tech companies and pricey real estate. Bastrop still feels like a place that's not trying to be anything but itself. Maybe it's all those historical buildings. Maybe being outside of the capital, Bastropians can watch and learn how to expand without compromising the tight-knit feel of the town so many know and love.

During a visit in late June, I wander into R.A. Green Mercantile on Main Street seeking some AC and a little shade. Most of the vendors are closed, but I meet a jewelry maker named Dee Turnbow, who moved to Bastrop from Harlingen 11 years prior to help open a church plant. When I ask what she thinks of all the growth in town, her mouth tightens and her forehead creases with frustration. "People are leaving California for reasons like it's expensive or there's traffic, but they're bringing those same things here," she says. "But it's still Texas. It's still friendly."

I continue down the hall and meet high school sophomore Lauren Martinez, who works at Vibe Tribe, one of the craft stalls. She says she welcomes the changes in her hometown. She likes the energy and the new ideas she's seen. Martinez tells me she wants to travel and see the world when she finishes high school. Then she adds, "But I'll always come back to Bastrop." **L**



2022 TEXAS BUCKET LIST



22 TRIPS TO ELEVATE YOUR YEAR IN TRAVEL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KELLY KENNEDY

A

As the calendar flips to a new year, we can't help but feel cautiously optimistic about 2022. The last two years have felt like a roller coaster ride, plunging us into isolation, then offering a glimpse of normalcy before swerving into uncertainty once more. But here we stand, blinking into a new horizon. The sun is just rising. The paths are clearer. And we're ready to hit the road (while following destination-recommended COVID protocols, of course). We're excited to explore new attractions—like a revitalized park in downtown Austin—and revisit old favorites, like oyster shacks on the coast and high school football games on Friday nights. Lest the possibilities overwhelm, we've curated 22 bucket-list items to make the most of your year in travel. Time to hit the road.

SOCORRO MISSION





REDISCOVER BOQUILLAS

When the pandemic started, the federal government closed the international crossing between Big Bend National Park and the Mexican village of Boquillas. Twenty months later, the Boquillas Crossing reopened, allowing park visitors to cross with a passport and \$3 entry fee. The quaint town of 300, which depends almost entirely on tourism, was hit hard by the closing, though local outfitter Boquillas Adventures raised money to help provide some relief. Now that the crossing is open, regular traffic will hopefully help the hamlet bounce back financially. The Boquillas International Ferry offers boat rides across the Rio Grande. From the shoreline, visitors can walk into town or hire a burro for a few extra dollars. Residents sell artisan goods, and Boquillas Adventures offers tours by canoe, foot, or truck. For refreshment, Boquillas Restaurant and José Falcon's serve lunch and margaritas. A few hours spent exploring Boquillas and taking in the views of the Rio Grande and the Chisos and Del Carmen mountain ranges creates an indelible experience. boquillas.org

—Joe Nick Patoski

DRIVE THE EL PASO MISSION TRAIL

Everyone remembers the Alamo, but did you know Texas' two oldest missions—Ysleta (founded in 1680) and Socorro (founded in 1682)—are a five-minute drive apart in far West Texas? Both missions—along with the San Elizario Presidio and Chapel—are on a 9-mile stretch of road just outside El Paso. From March through November, on the third Sunday of each month, the San Elizario Historic District Association hosts the Mission Trail Art Market. visittelpasomissiontrail.com

—Roberto José Andrade Franco



SPEND THE NIGHT IN ROUND TOP

A host of creative new sleeping quarters makes the Texas antiques capital even more inviting. There's funky shipping container hotel The FlopHouse; gorgeous multi-cabin property The Vintage; and farmhouse-turned-butique-hotel The Frenchie. Because the University of Texas' nearby theater program, Shakespeare at Winedale, had its 50th anniversary derailed by COVID-19, the celebration of the Bard will be grand come July and August. theflophouse.com; thevintageroundtop.com; thefrenchie@guesthouses.com

—Clayton Maxwell

SEE LIVE MUSIC AT AUSTIN'S WATERLOO PARK

After a decade of extensive redesigning, Waterloo Park in downtown Austin now features 11 acres of green space with trails, gardens, and the striking Moody Amphitheater. The outdoor venue, which debuted in August with shows by Austin blues musician Gary Clark Jr., can accommodate up to 5,000 guests. In addition to musical performances, yoga and fitness classes, and art and cultural festivals, other events are constantly being added to the calendar. 550 E. 12th St., Austin. waterloogreenway.org

—ire'ne lara silva



RIDE COASTERS AT LOCAL AMUSEMENT PARKS

Roller coasters are more fun at indie amusement parks. The Mouse Trap at Wonderland in Amarillo, the Sandstorm at Joyland in Lubbock, and the Boardwalk Bullet at the Kemah Boardwalk are hidden pleasures as well as genuine thrill rides. The Switchback coaster at ZDT's in Seguin is the only reverse wooden shuttle coaster in the world. —JNP

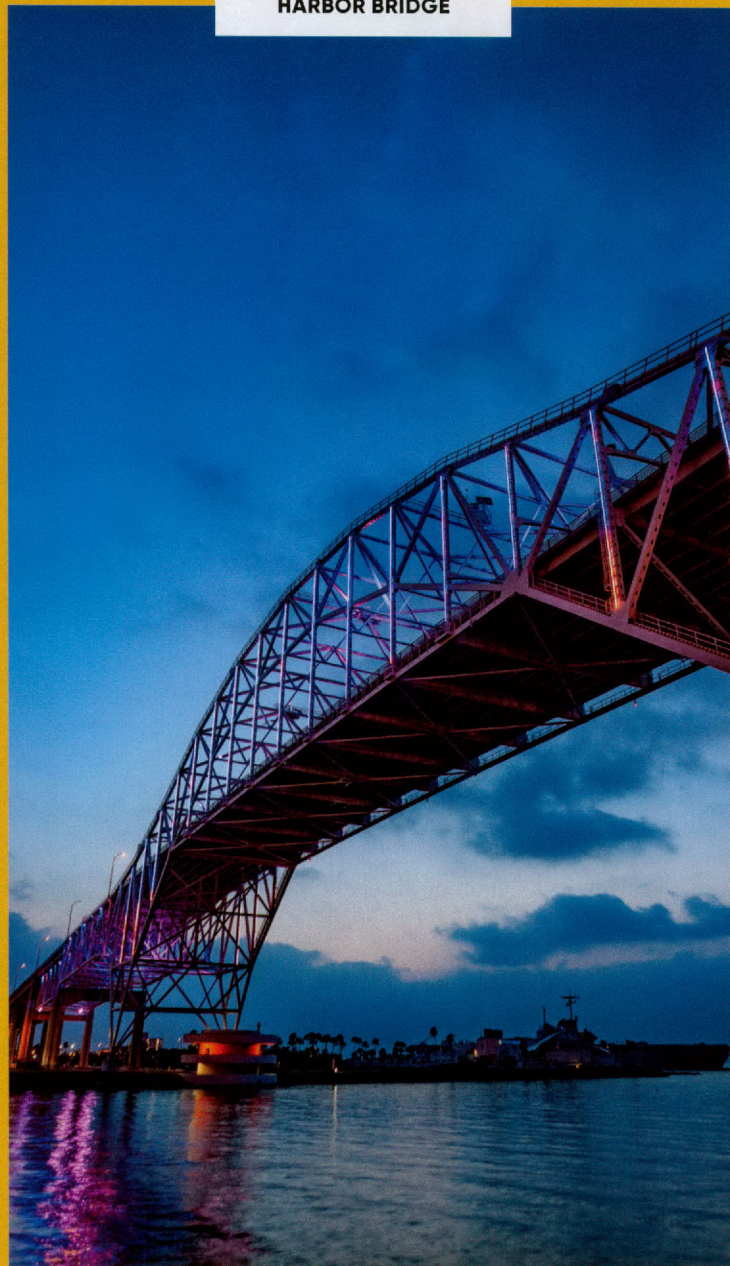
STAY AT FREDERICKSBURG'S SWANKIEST HOTEL

Set to open this summer, boutique hotel The Albert, located on Fredericksburg's Main Street, serves notice of a whole new level of hospitality in town. Named for the late Albert Keidel, an architect and historical preservationist whose family once owned the property, the hotel's metal-and-glass exterior intertwines around four late-19th-century limestone, brick, and wood structures. With 110 guest rooms, a spa, three restaurants, two bars, a pool, and an events center, The Albert is a sleek, contemporary lodging signaling a rising level of sophistication and popularity for the historic German village. 242 E. Main St., Fredericksburg, alberthotel.com —JNP

CATCH A FLICK AT A DRIVE-IN

Across the state, Texas is flush with drive-in movie theaters. When indoor theaters were shuttered due to COVID-19, drive-ins became a refuge and enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. The Mission Marquee in San Antonio is an old-school drive-in revamped into a community hub with a free family movie series and farmers market; Stars-n-Stripes Theatre in Lubbock dishes out yummy nostalgia at its accompanying '50s Café; and The Brazos Drive-In in Granbury has been continuously running since it first opened in 1952. Now's the time to break the Netflix habit, hop behind the wheel, and watch a reel beneath the stars. missionmarquee.com; driveinusa.com/lubbock; brazosdrivein.com —CM

HARBOR BRIDGE



CROSS THE GREAT BRIDGES OF TEXAS

Pontists, unite! See and drive Texas' biggest spans, each one an engineering marvel and a thrill to cross: Rainbow Bridge in Port Neches, the

Fred Hartman Bridge near Baytown, the Harbor Bridge in Corpus Christi, Queen Isabella Causeway linking South Padre to the mainland, and the Pecos High Bridge on US 90, situated 270 feet above the Pecos River west of Comstock.

—JNP

CELEBRATE GEORGE WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY IN LAREDO

No one celebrates George Washington's birthday like Laredo. Before the pandemic forced the event's cancellation in 2021, the city had been holding a party every year for decades. Receiving its state charter in 1923, the event began as a way for residents at the edge of the country to celebrate what they considered the most American of holidays. And every year since then, from mid-January to mid-February, Laredo has hosted a monthlong celebration in honor of the Feb. 22 birthday of the nation's first president. The Washington's Birthday Celebration Museum opens this year in La Posada Hotel, exhibiting a collection of memorabilia and costumes. wbcalaredo.org—RJAF

STEP INTO PREHISTORY ON MATAGORDA ISLAND

While we are blessed with miles of unspoiled beaches in Texas, the shores of Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area are on a whole other level. The only way to get there is via your own boat or by arranging a charter in Port O'Connor—the chamber of commerce recommends captain Sledge Parker of Hammertime Guide Service, and solo operators Larry Wheeler and Kirk Morgan. While camping is permitted on the unpopulated island, you must bring in all supplies, including food and water. Your reward is a Zen-like 38 miles of beach hiking, beachcombing unhindered by competition save for shorebirds and the occasional coyote, low-risk skinny-dipping, and a total reset from modern life. tpwd.texas.gov—John Nova Lomax

DINE AT CHUY'S IN VAN HORN

Every Texan should eat at Chuy's at least once. No, not the Austin-based national Tex-Mex chain—the other Chuy's, a small Mexican restaurant in Van Horn. It initially entered the national consciousness in the 1980s through John Madden, the Hall of Fame football coach and sportscaster. While making cross-country trips on Interstate 10 for games—he hates flying—Madden happened upon Chuy's and raved about the food during nationally televised games. Visit during football season, try the fajitas, and sit in Madden's old seat, right in front of the television. *1200 W. Broadway St., Van Horn.*—RJAF



GO ON A FOODIE TOUR OF DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE

The blue-domed bell tower that reigns over downtown Brownsville's historic Market Square once again rings with life. Thanks to preservationists, young entrepreneurs, and the growth of nearby University of Texas-Rio

Grande Valley, new eateries and cafés are waking up Brownsville's sleepy downtown. Highlights include Terras Urban Mexican Kitchen, Dodici Pizza and Wine, Las Ramblas Cocktail Lounge, and 7th and Park bike shop and café. terrasurban.com; dodicipizza.com; lasramblaslounge.com; seventhandpark.com—CM



TERRAS URBAN MEXICAN KITCHEN



FINE DINE ON THE TEXAS EAGLE

Long live the Amtrak dining car! The Texas Eagle Amtrak route, which extends from San Antonio to Chicago, offers a rare chance to savor a flat-iron steak and bottle of wine while speeding through the wide-open Texas landscape. Many East Coast Amtrak routes said goodbye to dining cars in late 2019, and their riders must eat premade, boxed meals. But on the Texas Eagle—which costs as little as \$19 for a trip from San Antonio to Dallas—white tablecloth dining rides on. Catch it while you can. amtrak.com —CM

VISIT PANCHO VILLA'S EL PASO

Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary, lived in El Paso during the early 1910s while plotting his revolt. He'd often eat ice cream at what was once Elite Confectionary—now a CVS on the corner of Texas Avenue and North Mesa Street. While it's no longer a scoop shop, you can still buy a cold treat in the grocery section of the pharmacy. For more history, stroll two blocks to the Caples Building, which was once the headquarters of the provisional Mexican government. Across the street is a building that was once the Acme Saloon, where outlaw and folk hero John Wesley Hardin was shot dead. *201 N. Mesa St., El Paso.*

—RJAF





BASK IN THE FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

Away from the mercenary nature of professional football, you can still see the sport played in its pure essence at more than 1,200 high school stadiums across the state. These range from state-of-the-art facilities in the wealthy suburbs of Houston and Dallas to quaint gems of West Texas—most notably, “the Pit” in tiny Sanderson, tightly hemmed in by the craggy Glass Mountains. Aside from breathtaking views, there are heated rivalries to take part in, like Longview vs. Marshall, Bay City vs. El Campo, or Brownwood vs. Stephenville. Or you could seek out the most promising talents at lauded programs like Lake Travis, outside of Austin, where you can watch the next Baker Mayfield. The venerable Dave Campbell’s Texas Football website can help you plan your trip. texasfootball.com

—JNL

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN NATURE IN SAN ANTONIO

Completed in December 2020, the largest land bridge in the United States—the Robert L.B. Tobin Land Bridge in San Antonio—connects two parts of the 330-acre Phil Hardberger Park that had been divided by Wurzbach Parkway, allowing humans and animals to safely cross. Visitors can also enjoy an elevated skywalk through the serene treetop canopy, 7.5 miles of trails, a butterfly garden, playgrounds, and basketball courts. A calendar of guided tours and educational offerings is available online. [13203 Blanco Road, San Antonio. philhardbergerpark.org/land-bridge](http://13203BlancoRoad,SanAntonio.philharhardbergerpark.org/land-bridge) —ils



TOUR THE PAINTED CHURCHES

The painted churches of the Czech-German belt between San Antonio and Houston are famous for their ornate Old-World artistry, and there is no better opportunity to visit any of them than St. Mary’s Feast of the Assumption Day on Aug. 15. With some 5,000 annual attendees flocking to the church grounds in Praha, the town’s population of 25

explodes, mostly with former residents and their descendants returning to their roots. The 166-year-old feast—also known as Pražská Pout, or Prague Fair—returns after being canceled due to COVID with fare like fried chicken and Praha stew, games like horseshoes and bingo, live polka, and beer. 618 N. Main St., Schulenburg. 979-743-4514; schulenburgchamber.org/painted-churches-tour

—JNL

ST. MARY’S CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY



AUSTIN FC FANS



CHEER ON AUSTIN FC

Texas is having its own *Ted Lasso* moment as Austin FC, the capital city's Major League Soccer team that launched in 2021 and is co-owned by Matthew McConaughey, lights up the state's professional soccer scene. On game night, Austin's new Q2 Stadium is an electric-green hive of dedicated fans,

shouting "Listos!" (Ready!) and other chants for the home team, which also goes by the name Los Verdes. With more losses than wins in its inaugural season, which lasted from May to November, the team has room to grow. Dallas and Houston also have MLS teams, meaning Texas soccer fans are primed to score. austinfc.com —CM

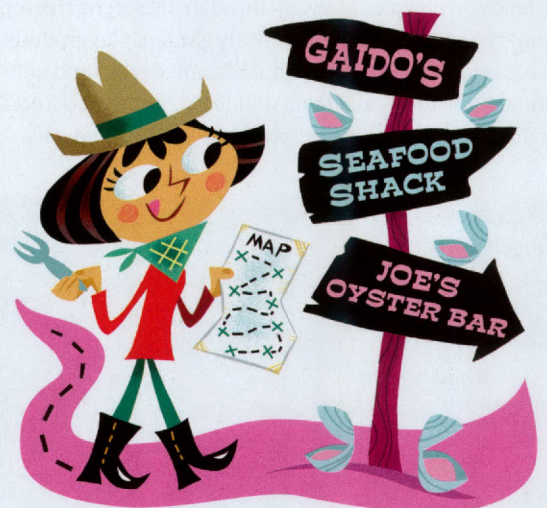


PLAY PICKLEBALL

It's time to paddle up and see why everyone from Gen Z Zoomers to Baby Boomers has gone nuts for pickleball. The easy-to-learn, easy-on-the-body sport is a combination of tennis, pingpong, and badminton, and it grew over 21% in the U.S. last year. In San Antonio, Chicken-n-Pickle—a venue with pickleball courts and a restaurant—brings in the crowds; and in Austin, The Pickle Ranch, a 13-acre park, opened in late 2021 with pickleball courts, bocce ball, food trucks, and live music. *Chicken-n-Pickle*, 5215 UTSA Blvd., San Antonio. chickennpickle.com. *Austin Pickle Ranch*, 9110 Bluff Springs Road, Austin. austinpickleranch.com. —CM

EAT OYSTERS FROM EVERY TEXAS BAY

Instead of identifying all oysters culled from Texas as "Gulf oysters," there's been a campaign to give the oysters appellations based on their respective bays. Where they specifically come from causes different tastes, salinity, and textures. For a wide selection from many Texas bays, try Gaido's seafood restaurant in Galveston. Another option is to map a trail and hit up favorite local spots, starting with the Seafood Shack in Bridge City near Sabine Lake and ending at Joe's Oyster Bar in Port Isabel on the Laguna Madre. —JNP





MEDITATE AT THE AGAVE GARDEN IN MARFA

Featuring more than 20 species of agave plants native to the Trans-Pecos region, the Agave Garden in downtown Marfa also highlights two benches originally designed by the late Marfa-based art st

Donald Judd. The result is a contemplative space to enjoy *Agave ovatifolias* and *Agave lechuguillas*. Visit during the annual Agave Festival (June 16-19) when Marfa celebrates the plant through food, film, music, and spirits. *West Oak Street Between Highland and Austin streets, Marfa. agave.marfa.com —i.s*

TAKE A COCKTAIL TO-GO IN SAN ANTONIO

When the pandemic began and Texas restaurants were struggling to make ends meet, the state government temporarily allowed dining establishments to sell cocktails, wine, and beer to-go. In May 2021, it became a permanent law, opening a world of opportunities for those who like to enjoy craft drinks in the comfort of their own homes. There's much to be discovered in San Antonio's burgeoning beverage scene. Of course, many of these restaurants are atmospheric, so you may decide to grab a seat and stick around. Try the S'Peach'Less cocktail from Bar 1919, a creamy yet refreshing concoction made with peach, blackberry liqueur, gin, and fresh lime and ginger; or the Fowl Play from Esquire Tavern, a shandy that blends an IPA beer with tequila, Aperol, and grapefruit. *Bar 1919, 1420 S. Alamo St., Suite C01, San Antonio. Esquire Tavern, 155 E. Commerce St., San Antonio. bar1919.com; esquiretavern-sa.com —i.s*





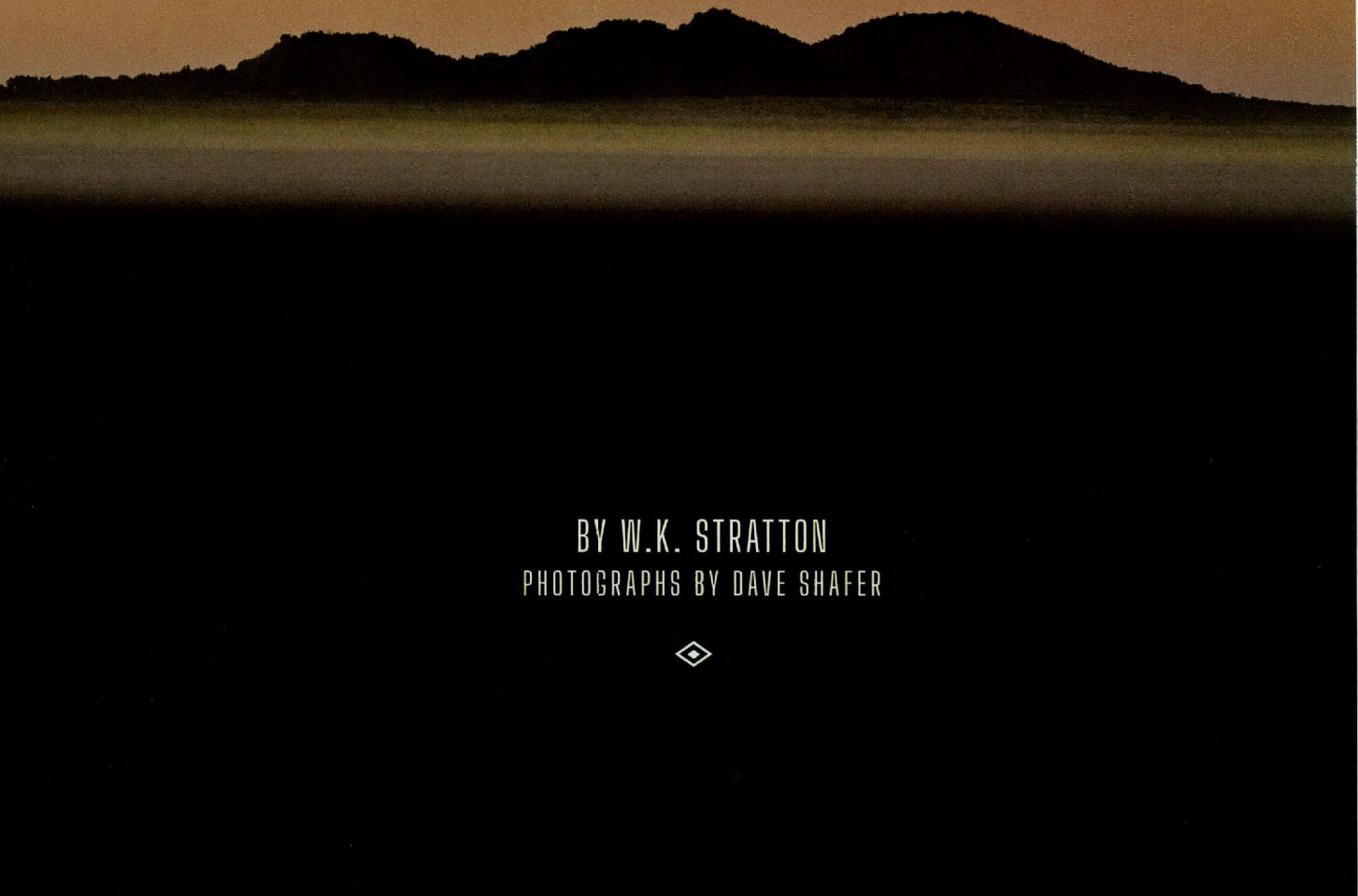
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Sacred

Refuge




THE COMANCHE MEDICINE MOUNDS ARE A RARE VESTIGE
OF THE MIGHTY TRIBE THAT ONCE CONTROLLED TEXAS



BY W.K. STRATTON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE SHAFER





It's not a long hike



to the top of the highest of the four Comanche Medicine Mounds, which are located a few miles southeast of Quanah, near the Red River in northern Texas. It's also not easy. Even following a trail of switchbacks cut through the brush, I encounter obstacles: loose gravel here, horse crippler cactus there, not to mention the prospect of diamondback rattlesnakes lounging in the low shade of redberry cedars. But it's worth the risk: When I reach the apex of the flat-capped hill, I feel like I'm walking on top of the world.

I'm actually only about 300 feet above the rolling plains that surround these dolomite mounds, but I can see for miles. The Wichita Mountains rise above the morning horizon 75 miles to the northeast in Oklahoma. Quanah Parker, the best-known Comanche chief, and his mother, Naduah (Cynthia Ann Parker), are buried at the Fort Sill Post Cemetery near the Wichitas. Since long before Quanah's challenging tenure as a tribal leader in the late 19th century, and continuing to today, Comanche people have traveled to the Medicine Mounds in search of healing plants and spiritual renewal.

I feel the energy as I look out over the plains. My hike is part of the inaugural Quanah Parker Medicine Mounds Gathering, held last June in the town of Quanah and on the Medicine Mounds Ranch to celebrate Comanche heritage and Quanah's legacy. The three-day public event—scheduled to return in June 2022—includes lectures on Comanche history and culture; demonstrations of Indigenous arts, dance, and music; and opportunities to participate in sweat lodges and hikes on the Big Mound.

During my hike, we stopped on the saddle connecting the two largest mounds for a cedar smoke and sage blessing conducted by Don Parker, Quanah's great-grandson. Then





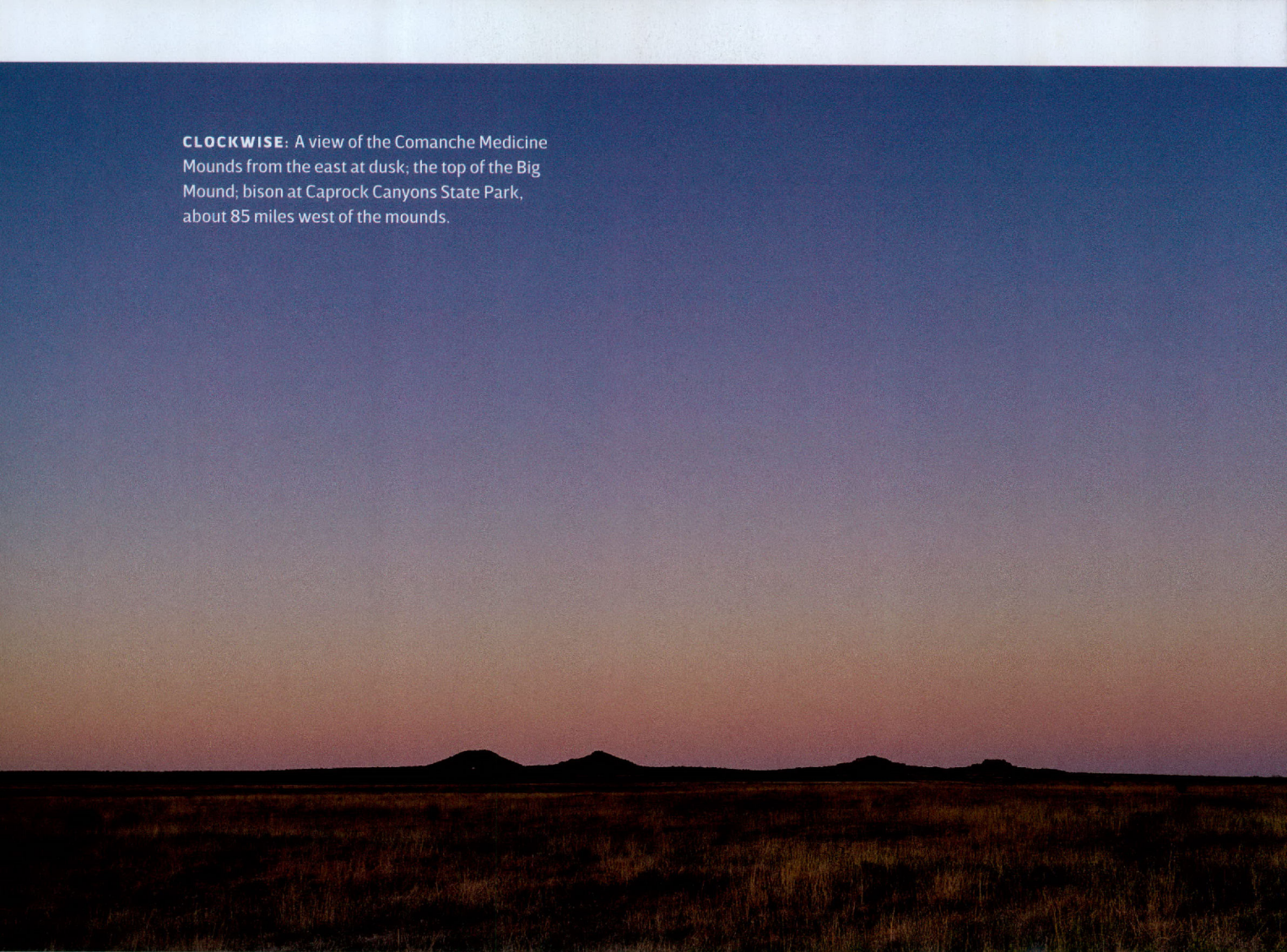
OPENING SPREAD: Ron Parker, great-grandson of Comanche Chief Quanah Parke; the Comanche Medicine Mounds. **THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Cedar smoke; brothers Dor and Ron Parker sing the Comanche song "Adobe Walls" on the Big Mound; redberry cedar tree; fire ring on top of the Big Mound.

we began climbing. Now, I'm at the top, feeling pure and at peace with myself and the world. Quanah also came here for spiritual quests, according to his family. "It's a sacred place to us," says Ron Parker, Don's brother. "And it always will be."

Numunu, "The People," as the Comanche call themselves, left a distinct and compelling mark on North America. The tribe—"Comanche" is derived from a Ute term for "stranger" and was applied to the band by other native people—began as a small offshoot of the Shoshone in the 1600s and grew to become the most powerful military, political, and economic force between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. Though no monuments to them are found at the Texas Capitol, they controlled most of what's now Texas for decades during the 18th and 19th centuries.

At their peak around 1800, the Comanche numbered approximately 35,000. Then, hammered by drought, warfare, and smallpox and cholera epidemics, their numbers dwindled to as few as 1,500 by the 1870s. In recent years, the tribal population has grown. Now there are 17,000 enrolled tribal members, with 7,000 living on or close to the reservation in Oklahoma and the others scattered across the country, including 1,600 in Texas, according to the Comanche Nation. I had met the Parkers, who live in Lawton, Oklahoma, while writing about Comanche history, a saga that has interested me since my childhood in Oklahoma.

CLOCKWISE: A view of the Comanche Medicine Mounds from the east at dusk; the top of the Big Mound; bison at Caprock Canyons State Park, about 85 miles west of the mounds.



So, when Ron Parker asked me to help organize the June gathering, I didn't hesitate to say yes. It gave me a chance to climb the Medicine Mounds.

FOR YEARS, THE MEDICINE MOUNDS

piqued my curiosity as I drove US 287 between Wichita Falls and Amarillo. The four mounds begin roughly halfway between Chillicothe and Quanah and form a chain running northwest from the smallest, Little Mound, to the largest, the Medicine Mound, or Big Mound. The dolomite at their core is a sedimentary legacy from when Texas lay under an ocean millions of years ago. While the surrounding land has been cultivated over the last 150 years, the mounds have remained largely untouched.

"What you're left with are the areas that couldn't be modified," says master naturalist Ben Sandifer, of Dallas. An accountant by profession, Sandifer has studied the Medicine Mounds extensively as part of his outdoor avocation. "The ground was too poor for farming, and it couldn't support livestock grazing."

The conical hills attracted American immigrants, who settled around them in the late 1800s. Remnants of a ghost town called Medicine Mound sit a short distance east of the Big Mound. Today the Downtown Medicine Mound Museum chronicles farm and ranch life near the mounds. Novelist Robert Flynn, an 89-year-old who was raised on a farm near Chillicothe, told me he picnicked with his family on top of the Big Mound when he was a kid during the 1930s, with thousands of acres of cotton and grain fields spreading below as far as the eye could see.

The rolling plains were a paradise for the Comanche, whose livelihoods centered around the American bison. Herds in this part of Texas numbered in the tens of thousands of animals and yielded tremendous harvests of hides and meat. But even for the Lords of the Plains, as Comanches came to be known, the grasslands could be harsh. Summers were brutal, and some of the rivers, such as the Pease, have a salinity that makes the water undrinkable to humans. The mounds provided respite with a spring at the base of the Big Mound. Cottonwood trees, whose bark could be fed to horses, grow nearby. In a 1995 article in the journal *Plains*



*"If you look
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Mound."*

Anthropologist, the late Comanche artist Leonard "Black Moon" Riddles told an archeological team studying the mounds: "Just as sure as anywhere there's a Comanche, if there's good water and there's a knoll, they'd have been on top of that knoll."

Comanche had other compelling reasons to visit. Serving as sky islands, the mounds harbor flora and fauna that have disappeared from the surrounding landscape—redberry cedar, pecan, hackberry, yucca, silver-leaf nightshade, and silvery wormwood among them, Sandifer says. "If you look at what the Comanche used in their faith and their healing practices, it was and is on the Big Mound," he continues. "These are all critical pieces of Comanche healing. In some cases, you'd have to go 50 miles away to find these plants."

Sanapia, born in 1895 on the Comanche reservation, was the last of the "eagle doctors"—tribal masters of herbal and spiritual healing. Before her death in 1984, she shared much of her knowledge with David E. Jones, an anthropologist whom she adopted as her son. In Jones' 1984 book, *Sanapia: Comanche Medicine Woman*, the eagle doctor describes redberry cedar as a particularly important plant for both

body and soul. Unlike red cedars and mountain cedars, redberry are relatively rare and noninvasive. "Only use that redberry kind," Sanapia says. "It grows on those slick hills west of here," meaning the Medicine Mounds.

During my visit to the Medicine Mounds, Don Parker harvests twigs from redberry cedars to use in his blessing on the saddle. Russell Neese, a former University of Oklahoma football player and an adopted member of the Parker family, has joined in our efforts. "Our spiritual beliefs are not hard to understand," explains Neese, who speaks the Comanche language. "The golden eagle is sacred because it is the bird that flies the highest and is closest to God. Cedar smoke rises and makes its way to God."

The land remembers Numunu, and The People recognize the land as a respected elder "and part of the creator's handiwork," Neese adds, encouraging us to be silent and take in what we see, hear, and feel. Warriors would climb the big mound after denying themselves food and water for several days and sit in meditation until they received visions. The Comanche also buried the bodies of esteemed tribal members here.



AS PART OF THE MEDICINE MOUNDS GATHERING,

I participate in a symposium at Quanah High School, where I've been asked to speak on Comanche history. Much of what has been taught in classrooms, printed in bestselling books, and projected on cinema screens has been at best narrow and at worst incorrect.

"Foot troops were helpless against mounted Comanches in open country," wrote famed Texas historian T.R. Fehrenbach in his 1974 book, *Comanches: The History of a People*, "and heavy cavalry could not match, meet, or break them." It's true, but also marginalizing. Comanche were much more than master horsemen. Spain, Mexico, and the Republic of Texas failed to subdue them. Recognizing the Comanche's power, France opted to trade with the Comanche rather than fight. The Comanche were ferocious in combat, and at times they tortured enemies. But they were not "warlike, cruel, and treacherous," as J.W. Wilbarger described them in his 1889 book, *Indian Depredations in Texas*.

In fact, the Comanche were a resourceful people whose greatest skills were innovation and diplomacy. They grew

from a small Shoshone offshoot into an economic powerhouse with astonishing speed. They showed entrepreneurial acumen by creating an economy built on harvesting buffalo meat and hides. They traded with the French in Louisiana, the Spanish in what's now New Mexico, and other Indigenous people, selling horses and mules to tribes as far away as the northern Great Plains and Missouri. They also engaged in human trafficking and peddled captives—some abducted, some captured in battle with other tribes—at the slave markets run by the Spanish in Taos and Santa Fe.

It's hard to fathom the full extent of Comanche power as I look down at the plains from atop the Big Mound. It was a nomadic empire with no towns, cities, or fixed center. Numunu were divided into a dozen bands loosely associated with geographic regions. Everything was in continual motion for the Comanche. Standing where I am, I might have seen hundreds of men, women, and children and thousands of horses and mules on a given day in the early 1800s. Two weeks later, the prairie could be empty. The Comanche came and went that quickly.

By the middle of the 19th century, the Comanche trade

CLOCKWISE: A 1908 railroad depot in Quanah is home to the Hardeman County Historical Museums; the Medicine Mound Museum in the ghost town of Medicine Mound; the Quanah Parker Society & Center in Quanah.



machine was destroyed as drought, disease, and conflict with Western settlers and armies finally took their toll. Quanah Parker emerged as a military leader of the Kwahadi, or Antelope, band of the Comanche at the start of the Red River War in 1874. By his 20s, Quanah had already distinguished himself in battle. But the odds were against him as the U.S. Army launched a military campaign to force Indigenous tribes off the Southern Plains.

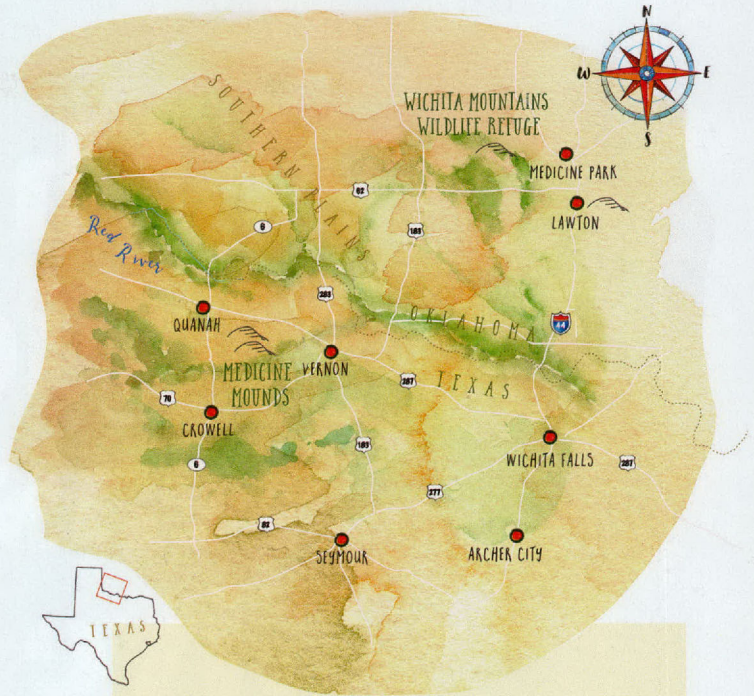
Relentless pressure, including defeats in the Texas Panhandle at Adobe Walls and Palo Duro Canyon, convinced Quanah to surrender to the U.S. Army and move the Kwahadi to a reservation established in the Wichita Mountains. On May 11, 1875, the Kwahadis began what's come to be called the "Comanche trail of tears," commencing at Teepee Creek, near the present-day town of Matador. By June 2, they reached Fort Sill, where the surrender was formalized. The Army confined the Comanche warriors to an unfinished ice-house building, where they were fed nothing but raw meat, much of it spoiled. Dozens of the detainees died.

In the face of such persecution, Quanah—whom the U.S. government designated the Comanche's principal chief—tried to adapt to changing times and bring his people along. He negotiated deals with Texas cattlemen to lease thousands of acres of Comanche land in Oklahoma for grazing. He befriended people like Charles Goodnight and Theodore Roosevelt, and he's thought to have been a behind-the-scenes advocate for the establishment of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, a lifeline at the time for the all-but-extinct bison. After white Texans named a town after him, he visited and gave it his blessing. When Quanah died in 1911, he was one of the best-known native leaders in America.

I KNOW MY 45-MINUTE SPEECH AT QUANAH HIGH SCHOOL

only scratches the surface. One of Quanah's great accomplishments was preserving as much of his culture as he could. His friendship with Texas ranchers made it possible for Comanche to visit significant locations such as the Medicine Mounds after the tribe was confined to the Oklahoma reservation. Current Medicine Mounds Ranch owner Frank M. Bufkin III carries on that tradition. "Medicine Mounds Ranch continues to recognize the significance of the mounds and its ongoing relationship with the Comanche people," says Jeffrey Bowles, who works in business development for the 22,000-acre operation.

Back on top of the Big Mound, a young Comanche man inserts an arrow festooned with feathers into the ground next to a redberry cedar. The arrow is a spirit stick, he tells us, in memory of his recently deceased father. He then offers up a brief prayer. I can think of no more fitting tribute than planting a spirit stick at this sacred place as the morning sun rises. 🏹



Comanche trail

EXPLORE MORE HISTORY of the Comanches and Quanah Parker at sites surrounding the Comanche Medicine Mounds.

The Quanah Parker Society's second annual **Quanah Parker Medicine Mounds Gathering** is set for early June 2022. Specific dates are pending. quanahparker.org

Named after Quanah Parker, the town of Quanah is a railroad and agricultural community and home to the **Hardeman County Historical Museums**. [facebook.com/hardemancountymuseums](https://www.facebook.com/hardemancountymuseums)

The Medicine Mounds Ranch offers guided tours of the mounds by appointment. medicinemoundsranch.com

In the ghost town of Medicine Mound, the **Downtown Medicine Mound Museum** chronicles local history. [facebook.com/downtownmedicinemoundmuseum](https://www.facebook.com/downtownmedicinemoundmuseum)

In Canyon, the **Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum** displays a Winchester Model 1873 rifle owned by Quanah Parker. The museum also owns the sites of two significant Red River War battles—Adobe Walls and Buffalo Wallow Fight. Find info at the museum. panhandleplains.org

About 50 miles north of Wichita Falls in Lawton, Oklahoma, the **Comanche National Museum and Cultural Center** displays tribal artifacts and can provide directions for visiting Quanah's grave at Fort Sill and his Star House in nearby Cache. comanchenation.com/departments/comanche-national-museum-and-cultural-center

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PLATES



THE PEACH GOBBLER sandwich, with turkey, cheddar, bacon, and peach chutney, is served alongside tomato basil soup at McKinney's Hugs Café.

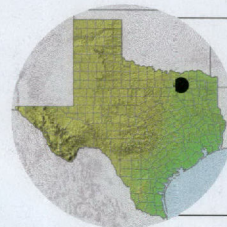


HUGS CAFÉ owner Ruth Thompson (center) gathers with her employees.

Sweet Embrace

Sandwiches, desserts, and possibilities are on the menu at Hugs Café

By Cynthia J. Drake



HUGS CAFÉ
224 E. Virginia St., McKinney.
Open Tue–Fri 11 a.m.–2 p.m.
and Sat 11 a.m.–3 p.m.
469-301-6900; hugscafe.org

Atidy café with a blue-and-green-striped awning in downtown McKinney buzzes with customers on a Thursday afternoon. People on their lunch breaks stand in line mulling over their sandwich orders, while families laugh together at tables topped with soups and salads.

“Welcome to Hugs!” a greeter named Marty Cole shouts above the din. A bright smile spreads across her face as she hands each approaching customer a menu listing the daily specials, including sandwiches prepared with house-made jams and

chutneys, and freshly baked cookies.

To the employees of Hugs Café—over 80% of whom are adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities—this lunchtime rush is typical. They have served customers when the line once wrapped around the building for two hours. They’ve also been interviewed for *NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt*. The employees, or “teammates,” as they are called, do their jobs unflappably.

“It just feels good to work inside this environment,” Cole says. Before the pandemic, the greeters were known for

giving their customers a parting hug. Unlike other service industry establishments, which have high turnover, the nonprofit restaurant has had nearly all the same employees it opened with six years ago.

Founder Ruth Thompson worked with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in a respite care and day program in Colorado. After moving to Texas in 2004, she sought a similar line of work and came up empty. She shifted to teaching cooking classes at McKinney’s Market Street grocery store armed with

only her background as a home cook. But she found ways to fuel her passion of working with the community by reaching out to recruit students with disabilities as participants.

One night, Thompson dreamed about a nonprofit café staffed by people with disabilities. She shared her dream with friends and soon found a building downtown and started collecting donations to make the café a reality. Hugs Café opened in 2015, and the companion greenhouse, which sells herbs and plants, opened in 2018.

From soups to spreads, everything is house-made except the bread. Kathy Lamprecht—a teammate who has cerebral palsy, which constricts the muscles in her hands—calls herself the “bread queen” and toasts the bread for all the sandwiches.

Two customer-favorite sandwiches are the Peach Gobbler, filled with turkey, cheese, bacon, lettuce, and a sweet-and-spicy peach chutney; and the Monte Cristo, which combines smoked ham and Swiss cheese with cherry almond jam slathered on powdered-sugar-dusted sourdough bread. The wedding cake cookies have amassed a cult following: People order the soft almond cookies drizzled with frosting to serve at wedding receptions.

But for Thompson and her staff, the ultimate joy of the restaurant is bringing a sense of camaraderie and purpose to the community. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities often fall off the radar in terms of visibility after aging out of the education system. “The majority of Hugs Café’s employees live at home and have a guardian,” Thompson says. “The guardians were concerned that when their kids would finish school at 22, their outlook was going to be sitting at home with nothing to do.”

In 2020, 13% of adults ages 16 to 64 with disabilities were unemployed compared to 8% of people without disabilities, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“I speak frequently at big corporations, and they talk about diversity—and then they don’t talk about people with disabilities,” Thompson says. “I ask them, ‘How

“My passion is I like to bake. I want to have my own business, Kay’s Cherry on Top. I want to support others.”

much does it cost you every time you lose and have to replace a person in your business?’ It will take you longer to train someone with [a disability]. However, if you treat them with respect and kindness, you’ve got an employee for life.”

Back in the kitchen, after the lunch rush, teammates are tidying up and cleaning and sanitizing plates and utensils in the dish pit. A list of prep work for tomorrow’s shift has started accumulating.

Kalyn Bradley, an assistant kitchen lead, introduces herself with a rundown of her responsibilities. Then she shares a bit about her dreams. “My passion is I like to bake,” she says. “I want to have my own business, Kay’s Cherry on Top, and hire young adults with special needs because I have Down syndrome. I want to support others.” That kind of confidence is something parents of other Hugs teammates see in their young adults, too.

“It’s so important for kids to have a sense of purpose,” says Lynn Zuercher, mom of 26-year-old teammate Dylan Zuercher. “Hugs has definitely helped define him. He just glows when he talks about it.”

Often, parents of young children with intellectual and developmental disabilities dine at the restaurant, and it gives the whole family a sense of possibility and purpose to see that kind of representation.

“We just have such beautiful moments here,” Thompson agrees. In 2022, she’s broadening her mission by debuting Hugs Training Academy, a program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who want to pursue a career in the culinary or hospitality fields. “The dream is big,” she says, “let’s just put it that way.” 🧑🏻‍🍳



FROM TOP: the café's exterior in McKinney; the dining room; a slice of pecan pie.





Takes the Cake

Baker Robin Croley's cheesecakes are the stuff of legend in East Texas

By Paul McDonnold

As fall comes to East Texas, breaking summer's feverish heat, Laura's Cheesecake in Mount Pleasant really starts to cook. A large standing mixer whines and spins. Batter slides into metal springform pans. Heat billows from an oven big enough for 90 cheesecakes, while vaporous cold emanates from two walk-in freezers. This operation produces 360 cheesecakes per week. Standing somewhere in the vortex is baker Robin Croley.

"I just throw everything up in the air and hope it lands right," she jokes.

Croley certainly landed in the right spot when she showed up at Daingerfield's Main Street Bakery in October 1989. Then 18 years old, Croley asked for a job with her infant daughter on her hip. "I'm ready to work," she told co-owner Walter Bass, who had recently opened the bakery with his wife, Laura Bass, to showcase Laura's from-scratch cheesecakes. Though Croley was inexperienced, the Basses decided to take a chance. On her first day, she pressed a batch

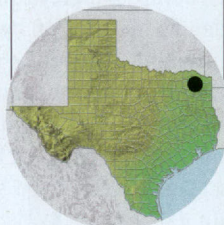
of chocolate-chunk-pecan cookies so flat they burned in the oven. After that, she worked in the front as the Basses trained her. An elderly employee of the Basses, Ms. Fannie, also helped, becoming something of a mentor to Croley, who had to learn everything from how to crack eggs to testing mixtures by texture as well as taste.

In 1995, the Basses sold the Main Street Bakery to Monica Walden, who only agreed to the deal provided Croley—by then a skilled baker—stayed on board. She did, and the two moved the entire operation to a building on the square of Mount Pleasant, 20 minutes northeast of Daingerfield. As a nod to its origins, Walden changed the name to Laura's Cheesecake and Bakery.

Mail-order sales grew with the internet. Delivery expanded to the continental United States, and the cheesecake operation got

LAURA'S CHEESECAKE

109 N. Madison Ave.,
Mount Pleasant.
Bakery open Mon-Sat
9 a.m.-6 p.m.
and lunch is served
11 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
903-577-8177;
laurascheesecake.com





FROM LEFT: baker Robin Croley; strawberry and Snickers cheesecakes; exterior on Mount Pleasant square; the turtle cheesecake with caramel and pecans.



its own building just off the square. Meanwhile, the café became a popular Mount Pleasant lunch spot. The daughter Croley toted into the bakery in 1989 grew up, became a nurse, and had children of her own. Through it all, Croley kept baking, flour and sugar now running in her blood. Her workday starts at 2:30 a.m., when the Mount Pleasant square is dark and quiet and she can work without distractions. They're typical baker's hours, and she enjoys getting off work while it's still daylight to pursue hobbies like gardening and raising turtles.

Every January, when the bakery's busiest season comes to a close, Croley can spend more time with her husband and family. She feels joy in knowing thousands of families across the country

have enjoyed her cheesecakes as part of their holiday gatherings. "We were able to be a part of making their Christmas special," she says.

As ownership and staff members have changed around her, Croley has become the heart and soul of Laura's. Current co-owner Suzanne Walker calls her "the thread throughout the tapestry." She sees Croley's cheesecakes, and Laura's itself, as being about more than just food. "It's about connecting people," Walker says.

Food, however, is the conduit. The café's lunch menu is an eclectic mix of salads, sandwiches, and specialties like stuffed avocados and Macho Nachos. Baked goods include the usual cookies and pastries, but cheesecakes—which come in 13 varieties—remain "the huge hub of the business," Walker says. The

velvety, classic cheesecake—Laura Bass' original recipe—is the blueprint. Croley's flavor creations include lightly salted triple chocolate; white chocolate raspberry; and a Texas-shaped turtle cheesecake, which sits on a brownie base and is glazed with caramel and studded with pecans. A sampler includes different varieties hand-assembled like the spokes of a wheel.

In October, Laura's opened a second shop in nearby Pittsburg. After 33 years in business, some things have of course changed. But as the owners and locations have shifted over the decades, the bakery still honors its original owner with its name and menu. And Croley still holds court over the kitchen—although there's no danger of burnt cookies anymore. **L**



FROM LEFT: Christian and Lisa Seger own Blue Heron Farm; Lisa cuts curds to make feta; goats named Gogo and Mimi.

BLUE HERON FARM

Cheese-making classes and farm tours are held on occasional Sunday mornings in the fall and spring. blueherontexas.com

The GPS on my phone tells me to turn off US 290 at the Buc-ee's in Waller. It leads me down Farm-to-Market Road 1488, then down a paved street that's not much smoother than a dirt road. I worry I'm lost out here, in this patch of country about 50 miles northwest of Houston. My worry dissipates when I see a slogan printed on a thin sheet of metal: "SPOILED GOATS. FRESH CHEESE." I've reached my destination.

In front of the sign, Lisa Seger, co-founder and co-owner of Blue Heron Farm, gathers the day's tour group. Before we begin, we meet a few animals from the farm's menagerie: two dogs, one of whom is named Octopus Moonshine, or Moony for short. She tells us we'll also meet three geese (all named Karen because, as Lisa says, "they all want to speak to the manager"), at least two cats, two guard donkeys, and, of course, the 37 or so goats that produce the array of dairy products the farm is known for.

"If you are only here to hug goats and take selfies with goats, that is understandable," Lisa says.

Lisa and her husband, Christian Seger, have been raising goats in the small community of Field Store since 2006. Christian had been working as a sound engineer for touring music acts and was growing tired of being on the road. He began joking about settling down on a plot of land with a herd of goats. Though neither of them had any farming experience—both are self-proclaimed city kids—they'd been swept up in the idea of starting a sustainable farm ever since reading Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* in the early 2000s. As Lisa tells it, Christian's jokes eventually "stopped being funny, and started sounding good." The couple

Charmed on the Farm

Blue Heron Farm's goats beguile guests and produce stellar cheese

By Hannah Smothers



purchased 10.5 acres, and Lisa quit her marketing job shortly after.

Lisa searched the internet to learn how to run a dairy goat operation. She figured out how to produce various flavors of creamy chèvre, goat feta, goat-milk yogurt, and *cajeta*—a sweet, caramel-like sauce that begs to be dolloped atop some vanilla ice cream—from reading cookbooks and consulting a crew of local goat owners she refers to as her “goat club.”

“The hardest part about making cheese, honestly, is milking the goats,” Lisa says. The rest of the process is a matter of heat, bacteria, and separating the solid curds from the liquid whey, which goes to the farm’s two pigs. During the productive spring and fall seasons, Lisa estimates she makes 50 to 60 pounds of chèvre a week.

Once everything is made and packaged, Lisa sells her products at Urban Harvest Farmers Market in Houston on Saturday mornings from 8 a.m. to noon. The *cajeta*, which doesn’t have to stay refrigerated and travels a bit easier than the other products, can also be found at Dairymaids in Houston, Antonelli’s Cheese Shop in Austin, or online through Blue Heron’s website.

Part of what makes the farm’s dairy products so good is how spoiled the goats are. For starters, the Segers bottle feed all of them when they’re kids, which leads to the goats “really thinking of people as their family,” Lisa says. They’re given names like Yoda and Electra—one particularly rambunctious goat is named Rosemary’s Baby. They’re fed strictly non-GMO food, and they’re milked twice per day.

For a dozen or so weekends during the year, Christian and Lisa welcome visitors—at \$10 a pop—to their farm. The tours, offered on Sundays in the fall and spring, are two hours long. Guests meet the goats (and take selfies with them, if

they wish), milk a goat (always Electra, who loves the attention), and sample some of the Segers’ chèvre and *cajeta*.

Lisa describes the farm as “a working farm,” meaning the animals all have distinct roles: Moony, for instance, is on coyote patrol, as are the guard donkeys, whose job it is to stampede around the field’s perimeter if a coyote or stray dog threatens the goats. It also means the tour is subject to the chaotic whims of the farm’s tenants. During my tour, three bucks—male goats—get into the shaded pen where the female goats are grazing. Christian eventually wrangles the spirited bucks back into their pen, though not until we’ve all witnessed at least a few unplanned trysts. Come spring, Lisa tells us, the tour groups will have the added privilege of holding baby goats.

Sandy Grimm, a Houstonian on the tour, has been visiting the farm at least a couple times per year ever since she found it on Facebook. Grimm has attended all the types of events the farm offers: the tour; fine dinners catered by Houston chefs; and Lisa’s cheese-making classes, during which guests learn about the process, make goat ricotta, and eat their final products.

“I love animals, so it’s a nice break from the city, just to be able to come and pet all their goats and their cats, and see the life they’ve made here,” Grimm says.

Kevin and Becky Blalock, a young couple, are especially attentive during the tour. They attend because they’re interested in starting a small goat operation of their own.

Becky first heard of Blue Heron after watching Lisa’s 2013 TEDx Houston talk about ethical meat-eating and farming. “I said, ‘These are my people,’” Becky recalls. “We wanted to learn about goats, and so that was why we came out here.”

After spending about 20 minutes getting nuzzled and nibbled on by the goats, we make our way over to one of the farm’s milking stands, where we all milk Electra. Afterward, Lisa brings us out to two long wooden tables where she has a selection of the farm’s cheeses and *cajeta* laid out with crackers.

As we mill around the table, snacking on cheese and drizzling *cajeta* over our crackers, Lisa tells me she and Christian are introverts who like living 30 minutes from the nearest H-E-B. They’d prefer to be alone, rather than around a bunch of people. So why does she keep bringing groups of strangers to her farm?

“They remind us why we do this,” Lisa says. “People are so happy to spend time with the animals, to spend time outside, and to eat good food. It’s so rewarding to have someone enjoy it. It sounds weird and hokey, but it feels good sharing, making someone else happy.”



TEXANA

Our Lovable Lizards

Inside the effort to save the ageless, fragile Texas horned lizard

By Asher Elbein

Once upon a time, you could find Texas horned lizards across much of the state: squat reptiles the color of rusty red and gray gravel, heads crowned with a fan of sharp little horns. Known as “horny toads,” the 5-inch lizards have been immortalized in magnets, murals, and even as TCU’s mascot. They were commonplace, easy to catch, and easy—in their grumpy, frowning way—to fall in love with.

“It’s got this cultural attachment in Texas,” says Nathan Rains, a biolo-

gist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “Everyone’s got an affinity for horny toads.”

The biggest and most widespread of North American horned lizards, Texas horned lizards thrive in arid landscapes as far east as Austin, subsisting largely on a diet of red harvester ants. Slow and relatively docile, horned lizards rely on camouflage to keep out of trouble, though when cornered, they can squirt blood from their eyes to startle predators.

At first glance, the Texas horned lizard looks prehistoric, ageless, and tough. But beginning in the 1950s, horned lizards

vanished from much of their historical territory. Older Texans “likely have fond memories of abundant horned lizards that aren’t there anymore,” says Andy Gluesenkamp, director of conservation at San Antonio Zoo’s Center for Conservation and Research.

Now, Gluesenkamp and San Antonio Zoo are part of a coalition of zoos, state agencies, and private landowners working on a tricky project: restoring the state’s most famous and finicky reptile to the places it once roamed—and making sure those habitats are ready for their arrival.



TEXAS HORNED LIZARDS get their name from their spiny bodies. Adult lizards subsist on red harvester ants.



San Antonio Zoo's Horned Lizard Reintroduction Project is housed in a tin-sided warehouse, far from the zoo's public exhibits. The "lizard factory," as Gluesenkamp calls it, holds racks of terrariums populated by horned lizards basking under heat lamps, some of them hatchlings still small enough to sit on a nickel. "Most of our animals were plucked up off of the blacktop, where the next car might have been the one that did them in," Gluesenkamp says. "We're really trying to minimize the impact to any wild populations, even though we collect only a negligible amount in any given year."

The lizard's fragility has been recognized since at least 1977, when the state officially classified horny toads as threatened. The growing sprawl of Texas cities wiped away large swaths of habitat. Rangeland also changed as nonnative grasses like bermuda grass, intended

to feed livestock, created impenetrable thickets for the lizards, who live their lives an inch above the ground. Widespread pesticide use and invasive fire ants, meanwhile, devastated the red harvester ant colonies that horned lizards depended on. By the 21st century, horny toads had all but disappeared from East and Central Texas.

In 2007, TCU researchers began studying the diet and genetics of the species. They discovered that the North Texas and South Texas populations of horned liz-

"Texans love horned lizards as much as they hate all other reptiles combined."

ards are genetically distinct. To preserve genetic diversity, Rains says, conservationists tried to match adults from their specific groups for breeding. In the process, they found that 70-90% of adults normally die every year in the wild.

"That's a real challenge when you're trying to reintroduce a species," Rains says. "There just weren't enough existing adults to make up for the losses."

In other words, if the horned lizard was to be returned to its old stomping grounds, conservationists needed a ready supply of new lizards. The Fort Worth Zoo had already begun a breeding program for the northern genetic population in 2000. After years of pilot release programs at the Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area—33 miles west of Llano—several dozen hatchlings released in 2019 were the first to breed and reproduce on their own. Last September, the zoo released another 204 hatchlings.

When Gluesenkamp left his position as a Texas Parks and Wildlife herpetologist in 2016 to join San Antonio Zoo, he immediately began working on a reintroduction program for the southern genetic population. "Texans love horned lizards as much as they hate all other reptiles combined," he jokes. "That makes it a lot easier to get people on board with what we're doing—restoring this really iconic species to our native landscape by managing biodiversity."

Breeding Texas horned lizards is difficult, however. To survive, the lizards need precise temperature and light regimens, and regular misting. A single lizard can eat as many as 100 harvester ants per day, and they stress easily. Females are capable of laying 30-40 eggs at a time, or having multiple nests in a season, but results in San Antonio so far have been mixed, says Arianna Duffey, a conservation technician at the zoo. One lizard laid 46 eggs, possibly a world record. Another left her eggs scattered haphazardly around the terrarium. Still another dug down to the glass bottom and piled them there.

"We've seen it all," Duffey says. "It's hard to say why they do what they do—if

SENIOR CONSERVATION

Technician Kamryn Richard weighs a horny toad at San Antonio Zoo's Texas horned lizard breeding facility.



A Helping Hand

Texas horned lizards, while adorable, are a protected species. It's illegal to catch them, keep them, sell them, trade them, or breed them without a permit. In addition, they simply don't survive well in captivity.

"If you care about horned lizards, work on indirectly helping them by supporting efforts like ours," says Andy Gluesenkamp of San Antonio Zoo's Texas Horned Lizard Reintroduction Project. "Or making space for horned lizards in your world. And don't use ant poison."

While San Antonio Zoo doesn't currently have any horned lizards on display, The Fort Worth Zoo, which also has a horned lizard breeding program, displays the critters in its *Texas Wild* exhibit. Visit the zoos' websites to learn more and support their conservation efforts: sazoo.org/zoo-conservation-efforts/texas-horned-lizard; fortworthzoo.org/conservation-projects-texas.

You can spot horned lizards in the wild at places like Palo Duro Canyon and San Angelo state parks. You can also check reported sightings on iNaturalist, a social network where people record wildlife observations. inaturalist.org

it's a matter of being captive versus in the wild, or being a first-time mom versus an experienced one."

The goal is to produce enough hatchlings to put 100 babies a year on the ground at a given site for three years, with a further 25 a year indefinitely. For that strategy to work, the team also needs to raise the tiny, extremely snackable babies—Gluesenkamp calls them "nature's popcorn"—to a size where they'll have a better chance of survival. Since the program's inception, San Antonio Zoo has managed to hatch over 100 lizards. "There isn't an owner's manual for it," Gluesenkamp says.

The San Antonio project is working primarily with private landowners. Its first hatchling release was 84 lizards on Matthew Winkler's 2,000-acre Blanco County ranch in October 2020. Last year, the zoo released another 23 lizards on the same land. "As a biologist and as a ranch owner, I like the idea of moving the environment of the ranch back to the way it was 300 years ago," Winkler says. "My goal is for other ranchers to go, 'Whoa, this is interesting, maybe we can get involved.'"

Gluesenkamp and Rains say they hear from plenty of landowners eager to participate in horned lizard recovery efforts. But it will be years before the zoos can produce enough babies to make a dent in demand. In the meantime, Gluesenkamp says, landowners can encourage lizard habitat by restoring native grasses, instituting controlled grazing and burning regimens, and fostering existing red harvester ant mounds.

Some ranches still have native populations of horned lizards. At the White Ranch near Mason, ranch manager Brian Wright is delighted by the wild hatchlings that scamper over the red dirt. Here, the babies are common enough that scientists visit to study them.

When he arrived at the White Ranch in 2015, Wright worked with a landowner who focused solely on managing for cattle. Now, Wright manages for wildlife as well, including horned lizards. "The other ranchers think I'm a tree hugger," he says, beaming through his white beard. "But I'm looking at ecotourism, which I think has the potential to be really marketable. And horned lizards are a big part of that." **L**



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EVENTS



Brrr-aving the Elements

Lake Granbury's annual Goosebump Jump raises funds for nonprofits

Add a splash of fun to the slow winter months with a jump into frigid Lake Granbury. During the Goosebump Jump, participants raise money for the charities of their choice by doing just that on Jan. 15.

The annual event, which started in 2020 but was canceled in 2021 due to the pandemic, is Granbury's way of helping nonprofits during the winter season while bringing new folks to town. Participants pay \$10 for an arctic dip in the lake, and many don costumes for an extra layer of entertainment—and warmth.

"The first year, we had a group of ladies take their plunge dressed up like jellyfish," says Tammy Dooley, director of Visit Granbury. "And the mayor had on shorts, a snorkel, and a coat and tie for his dip in the lake."

Participants meet at City Beach Park, and all jumpers make their way into the lake together. Some only make it waist-deep before heading back to land, while others are in it for the long haul with inner tubes in hand. During signup, participants list which charity they want their entry fee to support, and the charity that gets the most jumpers wins all of the money.

Additional attractions include snow machines and an ice slide that takes you straight into the lake. Awards are given out for best costume and oldest participant, and to the person who travels farthest to join the event. After the competition, the neighboring Hilton Garden Inn opens its doors for hot cocoa, cookies, and a dip in an outdoor hot tub to warm up. —*Amanda Ogle*

Goosebump Jump, Jan. 15
505 E. Pearl St., Granbury.
visitgranbury.com/events/annual-events/goosebumpjump

BIG BEND COUNTRY

DEL RIO

Continental Ranch Roundup Rock Climbing

Jan. 14-17

Challenge your rock-climbing skills at this winter event that takes place at the rugged limestone cliffs along the banks of the Pecos River. The privately owned property that opens to the public for this event is remote, making for a true climbing adventure.

Continental Ranch. 830-734-2444; drchamber.com

MONAHANS

Resolution Run

Jan. 8

Keep those New Year's resolutions going with a 5K, 10K, and 1-mile health walk. *Monahans Sandhills State Park*, 2500 I-20.

432-943-2187; monahans.org

GULF COAST

BAY CITY

Wild Game and Wine Camofest

Jan. 29

Taste wild game, wine, and craft beer. There is free live entertainment, vendors, downtown shopping, and free activities for kids. *Downtown Bay City, Sixth Street and Avenue G*. 979-557-4890; facebook.com/baycitycamofest

CLUTE

The Lion in Winter

Jan. 21-30

This stage classic depicts the personal and political conflicts of King Henry II of England, his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, their children, and their Christmas guests in 1183. *Center for the Arts and Sciences*, 400 College Blvd. 979-265-7661; brazosportcenter.com

CORPUS CHRISTI

Rembrandt and the Jews:

The Berger Print Collection

Through Jan. 2

Dr. Howard and Fran Berger donated their Rembrandt print collection to California's Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art in 2014. Their goal in collecting Rembrandt's prints was to highlight

the artist's nuanced relationship with Amsterdam's Jewish population and the insights the artist brought to interpretations of Old Testament stories. Rembrandt broke from traditional depictions of biblical narratives, adding depth to his subjects through expressive faces, dramatic body language, and his bold use of shadow and light. *Art Museum of South Texas*, 1902 N. Shoreline Blvd. 361-825-3500; artmuseumofsouthtexas.org

GALVESTON

The Grand 1894 Opera House's 127th Birthday

Jan. 3

Take a self-guided tour of the historic Grand, which opened in 1894 and survived the storms of 1900 and 1915, as well as years of neglect at various times throughout its history. *The Grand 1894 Opera House*, 2020 Postoffice St. 409-765-1894; thegrand.com

GALVESTON

Yaga's Chili Quest and Beer Fest

Jan. 14-15

Sample the work of multiple chili cookoff teams and a variety of craft and imported beers. A washer-pitching tournament, 5K fun run and walk, margarita-making contest, live music, and vendors round out the day. An awards ceremony names the best chili on Galveston Island. *The Strand*, 2302 Strand St. 409-770-0999; yagaschiliquest.com

GALVESTON

Neil Berg's 50 Years of Rock 'n' Roll 2

Jan. 30

With a cast from the Broadway musical and rock 'n' roll singers, Neil Berg tells the 50-year history of the music that changed the world. *The Grand 1894 Opera House*, 2020 Postoffice St. 409-765-1894; thegrand.com

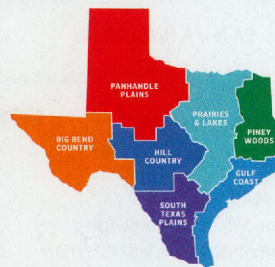
HOUSTON

Copy Culture: Zines Made and Shared

Through Jan. 8

The exhibition celebrates the history, practice, and community of self-described "zinesters." Zines—small circulation booklets created and distributed by

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individuals or small groups—have brought together and created space for marginalized, under-represented, and dissident voices to share knowledge and find community. *Copy Culture* features zines and ephemera from Texas and beyond, inviting visitors to learn by making their own. *Houston Center for Contemporary Craft*, 4848 Main St. 713-529-4848; crafthouston.org

HOUSTON
Later, Longer, Fewer: The Work of Jennifer Ling Datchuk

Through Jan. 8
The exhibition features blue-and-white porcelain sculptures, large-scale multimedia installations, and a performance video that critiques the realities and contemporary perceptions of women's access and liberation. Using Asian motifs common to blue-and-white porcelain, coupled with the design and material language of domestic objects and feminine beauty products, Datchuk elevates feminist perspectives while exposing systemic inequities that continue to stifle women's progress. *Houston Center for Contemporary Craft*, 4848 Main St. 713-529-4848; crafthouston.org

HOUSTON
MLK Grande Parade

Jan. 17
Consisting of 15 floats and 30 marching bands, the MLK Grande Parade in Midtown Houston is one of the largest single-day multicultural events in the U.S. held in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. *Midtown Houston*, 1200 Holman St. 713-560-8328; mlkgrandeparade.org

HOUSTON
Hops n' Hot Sauce Festival

Jan. 22
Vendors from across the country travel to Houston for the annual festival. Sample hot sauces, seasonings, jerky, jellies, and other goods. There are hot pepper- and spicy pizza-eating contests, and family-friendly entertainment, face painting, a photo booth, and craft beer. *SpindleTap Brewery*, 10622 Hirsch Road. 281-906-3731; hopsnhotsaucefestival.com

LAKE JACKSON

Bird Banding
Jan. 15
Watch volunteers collect baseline data on bird populations at the sanctuary. The banding station is an excellent opportunity to see birds up close and to learn about all the birds of the Brazosport area. *Gulf Coast Bird Observatory*, 299 SH 332 W. 979-480-0999; gcbo.org

PORT ARANSAS
Restaurant Week

Jan. 21-30
Take a culinary tour through Port Aransas' thriving food culture. Enjoy a prix-fixe lunch and/or a prix-fixe dinner at participating restaurants. *Various locations*. 361-749-5919; portaransas.org/sp/restaurant-week

PORT ARANSAS
Port Aransas Garden Club Home Tour

Jan. 29
The 32nd annual home tour features a lineup of homes across town. Tours are accessible by bus in the morning, and self-guided tours and golf cart tours are available in the afternoon. Drive yourself in the self-guided tours, and for golf cart tours, a cart and a driver are provided. *Port Aransas Community Center*, 408 North Alister St. portaransasgardenclub.org/the-home-tour

ROCKPORT
Gospel Music Festival
Jan. 7-9
The festival features numerous gospel groups from around the state and nation, including Crimson River Quartet, the McNeills, the DeLowers, and Rockport's Gospel Force. *First Baptist Church*, 1515 N. Live Oak St. 361-205-2789; gospelforce.org/festival.html

ROCKPORT
Winter Texan Appreciation Day
Jan. 29
The RV Park Council and Rockport Fulton Chamber of Commerce host an Appreciation Day for the area's special winter guests. Come by for refreshments, presentations, door prizes, and entertainment. *Fulton Convention Center, Fulton Harbor*. 361-729-6445; rockport-fulton.org

SURFSIDE BEACH
Dunes Day
Jan. 15
Recycle Christmas trees into beneficial sand dunes along the Brazoria County coastline. *Stahlman Park*, 2211 Bluewater Highway. 979-864-1152; surfsidetxt.org

SURFSIDE BEACH
Surfside Food and Art Festival
Jan. 22
There's fun for all ages at this fifth annual event, including live music, a chili cookoff, art and food vendors, a community art project, and kids' activities. *Stahlman Park*, 2211 Bluewater Highway. 979-233-1531; surfsidetxt.org

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN
Luminations
Through Jan. 30
Enjoy the natural wonder of winter in the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Texas Arboretum. *Luminations* showcases thousands of luminarias, seasonal food and drink, and the light-splashed forts of Fortlandia. *Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center*, 4801 La Crosse Ave. 512-232-0100; wildflower.org/luminations

AUSTIN
Shen Yun
Jan. 7-9
Experience ancient China before communism. Shen Yun's unique artistic vision expands theatrics into a multidimensional journey. Featuring one of the world's most ancient dance systems—classical Chinese dance—along with animated backdrops and original orchestral works, *Shen Yun* opens a portal to a civilization of beauty and wisdom. *The Long Center for the Performing Arts*, 701 W. Riverside Drive. 877-663-7469; shenyun.com/austin

AUSTIN
Hadestown
Jan. 11-16
The winner of eight 2019 Tony Awards including Best New Musical and the 2020 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album, *Hadestown* delivers a resonant

and hopeful theatrical experience. *Bass Concert Hall*, 2350 Robert Dedman Drive. 512-471-2787; texasperformingarts.org

AUSTIN
City-Wide Vintage Sale
Jan. 15-16
Shop over 100 vendors for vintage clothing, midcentury modern décor, vintage art, collectibles, lighting, upcycled art, and unique finds at this sale that has been running since 1977. *Palmer Events Center*, 900 Barton Springs Road. 512-441-2828; citywidevintagesale.com

AUSTIN
3M Half Marathon
Jan. 23
The mostly downhill course takes runners past some of Austin's iconic locations and finishes downtown near the Texas State Capitol. The 3M Half boasts one of the fastest half-marathon courses in the country. *Downtown Austin*, 9700 Stonelake Blvd. 3mhalfmarathon.com

BANDERA
Hoka Bandera Endurance Trail Race
Jan. 8-9
The Hill Country State Natural Area serves as a great location for serious runners. Distances for the race are 100K, 50K, or 25K. This race involves trails of rugged beauty where everything cuts, stings, or bites. *Hill Country State Natural Area*, 10600 Bandera Creek Road. 830-796-3045; tejastrails.com/bandera

FREDERICKSBURG
Honor, Courage, Commitment: Marine Corps Art, 1975-2018
Through Jan. 2
The Marine Corps Heritage Foundation presents this traveling art exhibition that includes 36 works by 15 combat artists, portraying Marine Corps service from the mid-1970s through the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The 34 works on canvas and two sculptures speak to the experiences of the artists, most of whom were deployed around the globe. *National Museum of the Pacific War*, 311 E. Austin St. 830-997-8600; pacificwarmuseum.org

FREDERICKSBURG**Hill Country Gem and Mineral Show**

Jan. 15-16

At the 53rd annual show, the Fredericksburg Rockhounds show artifacts, exhibits, demonstrations, jewelry, minerals, fossils, and other precious items. Geologists attend to identify mystery rocks, and free door prizes are handed out. *Pioneer Pavilion at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, 432 Lady Bird Drive. 325-248-1067; fredericksburgrockhounds.org*

FREDERICKSBURG**Luckenbach Blues Festival**

Jan. 15

The 15th annual blues festival features an all-day music lineup with some of the best blues artists in the state. *Luckenbach Texas, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. 877-466-3404; luckenbachtexas.com*

FREDERICKSBURG**The Agarita Chamber Players**

Jan. 16

Fredericksburg Music Club presents the group founded by four musicians (playing the violin, viola, cello, and piano) based in San Antonio. Agarita aims to nourish the arts community through multidisciplinary collaboration, educational community engagement, and free programming. *Fredericksburg United Methodist Church, 1800 N. Llano St. fredericksburgmusicclub.com*

FREDERICKSBURG**Hill Country Indian Artifact Show**

Jan. 22

The show offers a wide variety of Native American artifacts and other pieces from Texas and the United States including arrowheads, pottery, beads, and books. *Pioneer Pavilion at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, 432 Lady Bird Drive. 830-329-2636; hillcountryindianartifacts.com*

FREDERICKSBURG**Wine Lovers Celebration**

Jan. 31-Feb. 25

With Valentine's Day right around the corner, take time to discover Texas wine and enjoy the scenery in Texas Wine Country. *Various locations. 872-216-9463; texaswinetrail.com*

KERRVILLE**Hill Country District Junior Livestock Show**

Jan. 5-8

This annual county and district livestock show covers 34 counties,

with participants showing lambs, steers, swine, and angora goats. There are also demonstrations of mechanics and other livestock show activities. *Hill Country Youth Event Center, 3785 SH 27. hcdjls.org*

KERRVILLE**Outlaws and Heroes:****New Frontiers**

Jan. 8

The Symphony of the Hills orchestra welcomes the New Year with a musical exploration of the universal drive to seek new frontiers and accomplishments. A wine reception precedes the concert. *Cailloux Theater, 910 Main St. 830-792-7469; symphonyofthehills.org*

KERRVILLE**Winter Market**

Jan. 22-23

Vendors from all over the state present their art, jewelry, gourmet food, gift items, and other merchandise. *Inn of the Hills Hotel and Conference Center, 1001 Junction Highway. 888-225-3427; texasmarketguide.com*

KERRVILLE**Renaissance Festival**

Jan. 28-30, Feb. 5-6

Travel back in time to the Middle Ages and experience adventure, music, romance, and fun for the whole family. Play games of skill, eat a turkey leg, shop in the marketplace featuring over 40 artisans, and enjoy entertainers and musical acts on seven stages. *River Star Arts and Events Park, 4000 Riverside Drive. 214-632-5766; kerrvillerenfest.com*

NEW BRAUNFELS**Hair of the Dog Day**

Jan. 1

Free live shows are performed all day at Gruene Hall on New Year's Day. *Gruene Hall, 1281 Gruene Road. 830-629-5077; gruenehall.com*

TAYLOR**Run for the Roses 5K and 10K**

Jan. 15

The ninth annual 5K and 10K benefits the Taylor Garden Club, which provides scholarships for youths who are pursuing careers in ecology, horticulture, landscaping, arbor, and forestry studies. *Murphy Park, 12th and Vance streets. 512-924-3276; athleteguild.com*

TAYLOR**Martin Luther King Jr. March and Program**

Jan. 17

Join a march through the town in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. It

begins at Fannie Robinson Park and ends with a program at City Hall. *Robinson Park, 260 S. Dolan St. 512-352-5818; tayloramadetexas.com*

PANHANDLE PLAINS**LUBBOCK****High and Dry: People and Places of the World's Dry Lands**

Through Jan. 28

Celebrate the distinctive beauty of the world's arid and semiarid landscapes. Since 2001, the Office of International Affairs at Texas Tech University has curated this photographic exhibition of peoples and places of the world's dry lands. The 21st annual exhibit brings together hundreds of artists from around the world, all of whom have been asked to respond to some aspect of life in an arid or a semiarid region. *International Cultural Center, Texas Tech University, 601 Indiana Ave. 806-742-3667; depts.ttu.edu/international*

LUBBOCK**An Officer and a Gentleman**

Jan. 11

Based on the Oscar-winning film starring Richard Gere and Debra Winger, this stage performance celebrates triumph over adversity. *The Buddy Holly Hall of Performing Arts and Sciences, 1300 Mac Davis Lane. 806-792-8339; buddyhollyhall.com*

LUBBOCK**Caprock Corvette Show**

Jan. 22

The fifth annual indoor car show includes numerous Corvettes. *American Windmill Museum, 1701 Canyon Lake Drive. 806-747-8734; windmill.com*

PINEY WOODS**LUFKIN****Popovich Comedy Pet Theater**

Jan. 23

The Angelina Arts Alliance's Discovery Series presents this circus performer whose show incorporates physical comedy, juggling, acrobats from the Moscow Circus, dogs, and even house cats. *Temple Theater, 3500 S. First St. 936-633-5454; angelinaarts.org/discovery-series*

PRAIRIES AND LAKES**BELTON****Sami Show Marketplace**

Jan. 22-23

Visit many small businesses all under one roof, including artists, craftsmen, jewelers, boutiques, gourmet foods purveyors, home décor shops, and bath and body specialists. *Bell County Expo Center, 301 W. Loop 121. 512-441-7133; samishow.com*

CORSICANA**Navarro College Faculty****Art Show**

Jan. 20-Feb. 17

The Western Art collection at the Pearce Museum has more than 250 works of art in a realistic style that directly relate to the historic and modern American West. The collection includes media such as oil, acrylic, watercolor, egg tempera, and gouache, as well as bronze and alabaster sculpture. *Pearce Museum, 3100 W. Collin St. 903-875-7438; pearcemuseum.com*

DALLAS**Canvas and Silk: Historic Fashion from Madrid's Museo del Traje**

Through Jan. 9

See a major exhibition of Spanish dress and fashion that pairs approximately 40 paintings from the Meadows Museum's collection with historic dress and accessories from the Museo del Traje (Spanish National Museum for Fashion) in Madrid. Loans include ensembles for men, women, and children. *Meadows Museum, 5900 Bishop Blvd. 214-768-2516; meadowsmuseumdallas.org*

ELGIN**Polar Bear Plunge**

Jan. 1

Brave the cold water and jump into the New Year at the Elgin Municipal Pool at Morris Memorial Park. Hot chocolate and coffee are provided. Check online for most current information. *Morris Memorial Pool, 802 N. Ave. C. elgintx.com*

ELGIN**Bastrop County MLK Walk and Program**

Jan. 17

The annual walk and program includes guest speakers to honor Martin Luther King Jr. The cities of Bastrop, Elgin, and Smithville take turns hosting the event. *Various locations. elgintx.com*

FRISCO

FCS Championship Football Game

Jan. 8
The best of NCAA football meets again in North Texas at the NCAA Division I Football Championship Series. *Toyota Stadium, 9200 World Cup Way, ncaa.com/championships/football/fcs*

GRAND PRAIRIE

Lunar New Year

Jan. 21–30
Celebrate Lunar New Year with food, multicultural performances, and entertainment. *Asia Times Square, 2625 W. Pioneer Parkway, 972-975-5100; asiaticsquare.com*

MESQUITE

Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

Jan. 15
The city of Mesquite along with the Mesquite NAACP celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The parade takes place in downtown Mesquite with a reception at the Mesquite Arts Center. *Front Street Station, 100 W. Front St. 972-861-0863; cityofmesquite.com/3418/mlk-celebration*

SHERMAN

Martin Luther King Jr. Day March

Jan. 15
All churches, civic and social groups, and members of the public are welcome to the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day March. The march begins at 400 S. Travis St. and progresses eastward on Brockett. *Downtown Sherman, 400 S. Travis St. shermantx.org*

TEMPLE

Facing the Inferno: The Wildfire Photography of Kari Greer

Through Jan. 15
This exhibit explores the effects of wildfires on the U.S. and the effects of climate change on wildfires through the work of Kari Greer. Greer works for the National Inter-agency Fire Center based in Boise, Idaho, where she specializes in wildland fire photography and editorial photojournalism. The goal of this project is to propel conversation and to celebrate firefighters and survivors. *Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum, 315 W. Ave. B. 254-298-5172; templeparks.com*

TEMPLE

Cabin Fever: Stargazing Family Day

Jan. 8
Learn about constellations, meteor showers, and other celestial objects while checking out the night sky. *Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum, 315 W. Avenue B. 254-298-5172; templeparks.com*

TEMPLE

Alieno a Tequila

Jan. 28–March 16
This exhibit explores and celebrates the landscape, culture, and traditions that gave birth to tequila. A series of photographs by Joel Salcido include the original distilleries that founded the industry, as well as several artisanal tequilerias committed to the ancestral ways of tequila-making, from harvest to bottle. *Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum, 315 W. Avenue B. 254-298-5172; templeparks.com*

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

MISSION

Parade of Oranges

Jan. 29
This parade is part of the annual Texas Citrus Fiesta, a cultural event in the Rio Grande Valley that gathers residents from across the area in celebration of the citrus industry. *Conway Avenue. 956-585-9724; texascitrusfiesta.org*

SAN ANTONIO

Texas Biennial: A New Landscape, A Possible Horizon

Through Jan. 31
The seventh Texas Biennial is a geographically led, independent survey of contemporary art in Texas. This year the project is distributed across several Texas museums, featuring exhibitions, programs, and works of public art in San Antonio (Artpace, McNay Art Museum, Studio at Ruby City, and the San Antonio Museum of Art) and Houston (FotoFest). In addition to artists living and working in Texas, the biennial curators have broadened the scope of the project to include "Texpats," i.e. Texas natives and artists with deep connections to the state working in any part of the world. The biennial also features international artists for whom Texas and its history are subject matter. *Various locations. 512-939-6665; texasbiennial.org*

WESLACO

Alfresco Weslaco

Jan. 20
Alfresco Weslaco is a monthly celebration of music and art on the street. Downtown businesses are open late, and more than 60 vendors line the street. There is also a car show with classic cars on display. *Downtown Historic Weslaco, 200 S. Texas Blvd. 956-969-0838; facebook.com/alfrescoweslaco*

THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5



Longview

A view from the top

BY CHET GARNER

Somewhere between East and northeast Texas lies the charming town of Longview. As the legend goes, railroad workers inspired the town's name in the 1870s when they stepped on Rock Hill and proclaimed, "Wow, that's a long view." Whether enjoying the namesake horizons or forests of towering pine trees, you can fill plenty of long days exploring all this town has to offer.

Balloon Adventures USA

You have to start early if you want to participate in Longview's proud tradition of hot air balloon racing: The best time to go up is at sunrise. I jumped in the basket with balloon pilot Dr. Bill Bussey—who holds 15 world records in the sport—and quickly ascended into the sky. As we bobbed up and down just above the trees, I asked where we were going. "I don't know," Bussey responded, "but I've never left one in the air." We were truly at the mercy of the wind.

It'll Do Deli

This small, colorful deli will "do" a lot of things, including fill your belly with some of the tastiest panini sandwiches in Texas. The local favorite, Boathouse, is filled with chicken salad, avocado, jalapeño, and Monterey Jack cheese, pressed on a grill and cooked to cheesy-crispy-goopy perfection. Don't skip the house-made jalapeño poppers stuffed with pimento cheese.

Gregg County Historical Museum

This bank-turned-museum resides in the middle of the historical district and explores fascinating local lore, like the tale of how the Dalton Gang once robbed a Longview bank, and how the town once had a professional baseball team named the "Cannibals." Eek! The Caddo tools and pottery collected by local archeologist Buddy Calvin Jones are most impressive. With thousands of pieces, it's one of the most extensive collections in the U.S.

LeTourneau University

This small, private university is worth a visit to learn more about one of the most innovative engineers in the world—R.G. LeTourneau. Some call him the Thomas Edison of heavy equipment because he designed and built earth movers, scrapers, and off-shore drilling platforms. A photo exhibit, *The Man, His Machines, and His Mission*, captures LeTourneau's passion for innovation.

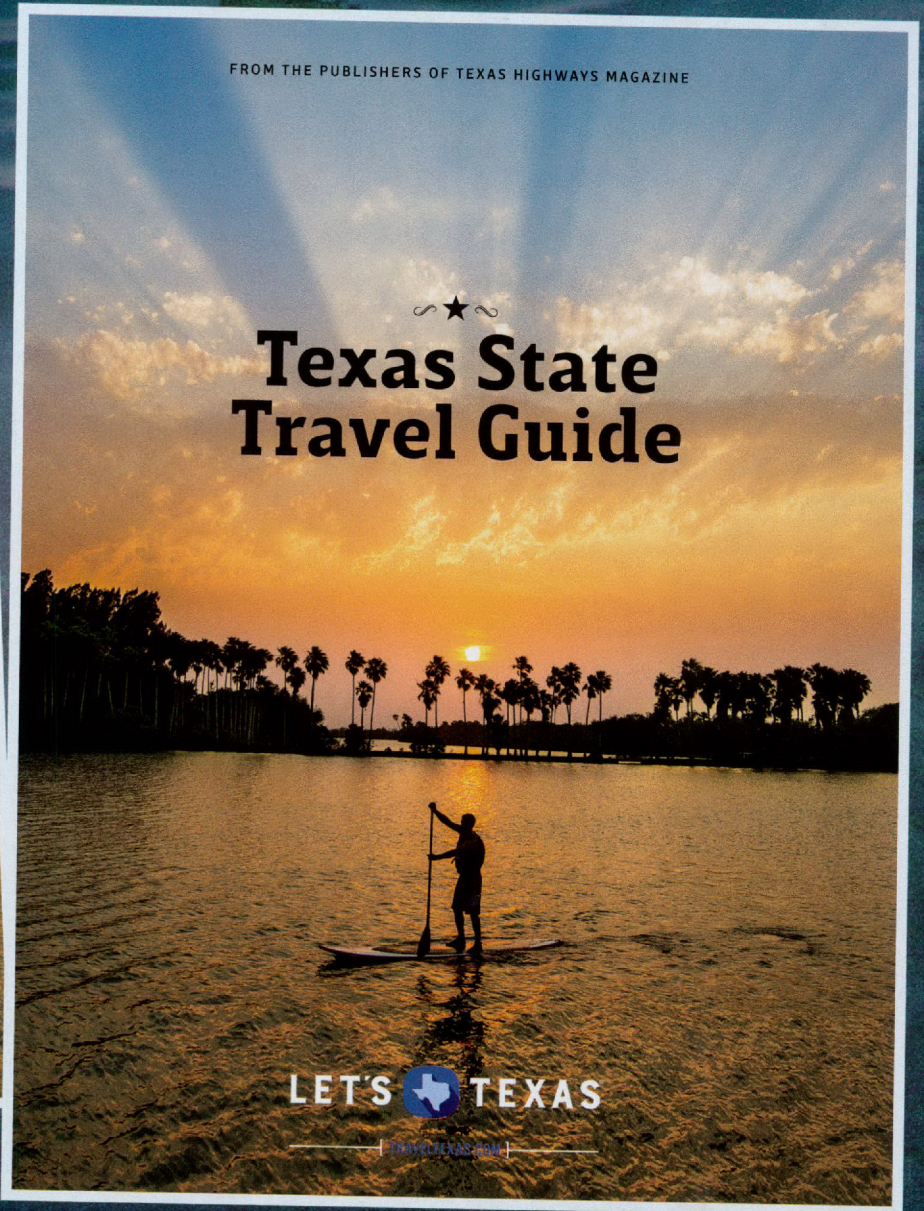
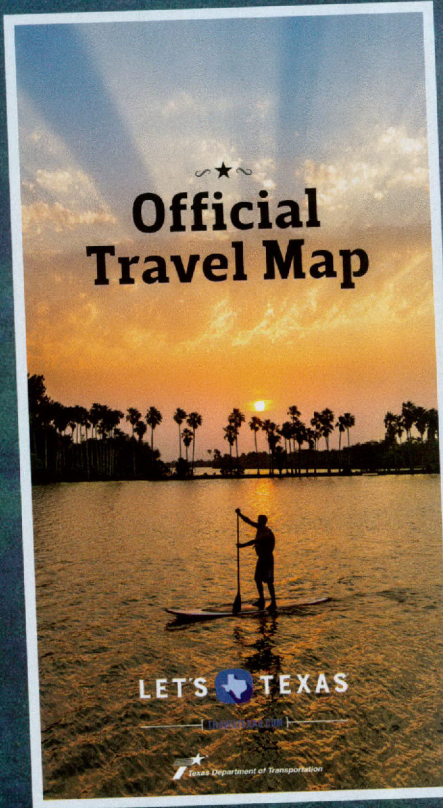
Tuscan Pig

East Texas may not be top of mind when it comes to authentic Italian food, but Tuscan Pig challenges that preconception. The owners of this restaurant started selling Italian food at the farmers market using some of their family recipes. It was such a hit they opened this brick-and-mortar establishment in 2016 and expanded the menu. My first piece of advice is to order their handmade country lasagna with layers of noodles, cheese, red sauce, and the namesake Tuscan-style pork. My second piece of advice is to loosen your belt and enjoy.

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

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Word Play

Texas Poet Laureate Lupe Mendez grew up with his feet in two worlds

By Roberto José Ardrade Franco

The poet Lupe Mendez is an animated storyteller. He'll change the tone of his voice, switching between English and Spanish as he speaks softer and then louder. It's a delivery he honed over 17 years teaching high school English in Houston. Mendez still works for the Houston Independent School District, but now he's a curriculum writer and teaching coach.

To get the full picture of Mendez's storytelling, it's best to see him onstage reciting poetry about his Texas roots, discovering other writers of color, and discussing why he chose to teach. He moves his hands as he talks, adding urgency, and sometimes incorporates the audience, asking them to repeat certain phrases to emphasize his spoken words.

To say Mendez knows what he's doing would be an understatement. He's been sharing his poetry across Texas and the nation for almost 20 years, while also working with the grassroots Tintero Project to help emerging writers of color amplify their voices. In

"What's the motto?

*Pos así es miyo,
si Dios nos
da licencia.*

**[That's how it is
son, only if God
gives us license].**

**I realized early
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in my family is
doing this. And so,
I have to do this
correctly. There's
no way I can
fake any of this."**



2019, he released an award-winning poetry collection, *Why I Am Like Tequila*. And last year, the state Legislature named Mendez the Texas poet laureate for 2022.

TH: *How did you celebrate being named the 2022 Texas poet laureate?*

LM: I posted it on Twitter and then went out for ice cream with my wife and daughter. That was the biggest thing at that point. I did have a moment when I wept a tear and thought if my mom was here to see this, she'd be entirely stoked. But then I giggled because I knew I had to explain to Dad what this means. I literally spent a little bit of time trying to figure out what's the best way to describe to my old man what this actually is. Because, typical familia, *"Te van a pagar?"* [Will you get paid?] No, there's no money. *"O pos, pa' que?"* [Then why?] All of that also gave me cheer—I get this honor, and I can't explain it to my old man because that's the way life works.

TH: What does the state poet laureate do during the year they serve?

LM: According to the state of Texas, nothing. They don't have to do anything. It's the honor. My intention though, I want to be able to figure out a way to highlight the voices of educators of color. I'm still trying to figure out exactly what that's going to look like. But, I want to be able to figure out a way to provide educators of color a platform to speak about their experiences in the classroom in an age and state where we're constantly dealing with the conversations and the politics of gun rights, the conversations and the politics of gender identity, the conversations and politics of racism, education itself, and now, most importantly, the history of people of color.

TH: When did you figure out you're a poet?

LM: There are like 45 grandkids in the Mendez family. Of the 45 grandkids, we're split pretty evenly—those in the United States and those in Mexico. Only about four of us have college degrees; two of us stateside and two of us in Mexico. And so, we never communicated through letter-writing. We were storytellers. There was always a story in front of a *lumbre* [fire], or drinking *cafecito* at night, or in the car. So, we were always hearing these stories. I knew by the time I was in fifth grade that storytelling was part of what I was doing. It was like, "Oh, I can hear these things, I can write about them, and I can create things from them."

TH: You come from farming families and grew up in Galveston to parents of Mexican ethnicity. How did that shape you as a poet?

LM: It gave me this cool ability to have felt in different spots. Growing up in Galveston, it's an island culture—we call it salt life. You're always at the beach; there's always a hurricane potentially popping in. But it also allowed me to see the breadth and width of the Texas Gulf Coast—from Galveston to Brownsville and San Benito, getting to see South Padre, getting to see

Port Isabel, getting to see Port Lavaca, getting to see what all those island communities look like. And then, because of my father, we were traveling to Mexico by car. Seeing the terrain change from flat spaces in the Gulf Coast area to rugged mountainous regions and valleys along the Sierra Madre Occidental, heading toward Jalisco. We'd drive for 24 hours—that was such a change of place. So I grew up with one foot on sand and the other in mountains. The amount of language, and ability, and story, and story-making kind of started with that.

TH: Your book, *Why I Am Like Tequila, has some poems in Spanish and some about the troubled history of Mexicans in Texas. Do you feel a responsibility to write this style of poetry?*


LM: What's the motto? *Pos así es mijo, si Dios nos da licencia* [That's how it is son, only if God gives us license]. That sensibility has always run through every Mexican's DNA, if you're from a space that's impoverished. These amazingly, almost historically impossible moments that you could write full epic tales of normal everyday living about—they're part of this massive story and history and legacy. When I figured out where I was going, and the road I was taking, in terms of storytelling and poetry, I realized early on that nobody in my family is doing this. And so, I have to do this correctly. There's no way I can fake any of this.

TH: It's been two years since you published your poetry book. What are you working on now?


LM: I'm currently wrapping up a second manuscript on the counter-history of what is known as the Houston *huelga* [strike] schools. Desegregation in the city of Houston occurred in August of 1970. The book I'm writing is based on interviews, diary entries, site visits—ethnographic work—looking at the history of what these *huelga* schools were. When the very district that I work for was run by lots of white men, they orchestrated a desegregation plan that was unconstitutional. They

paired Black schools with "white schools" that weren't white. They were Mexican students who were labeled as white. It caused lots of Black and brown students to drop out because it did not provide support for these kids as they shifted them around campuses to fulfill federal law. And so, as a response, Mexican families in Houston boycotted the school district and created their own system of schools, the *huelga* schools.

TH: How do you feel about the distinction of being Texas poet laureate?

LM: The interesting thing is that this is fleeting. I can be the Texas poet laureate for 2022, and the one person in my life who would have been ecstatic about it would have been my mother. But I lost her to COVID in 2020. And so, I'm able to talk to my father and describe to him, "Hey 'apa, me dieron este honor, soy el laureado del estado" [I received this honor, and I'm now the laureate of the state]. And my dad is like, "Pues que es eso?" [Well, what's that?] And I had to explain it to him because his understanding of the world doesn't include the arts. He understands painting, music, singing, movies. But the literary world, he doesn't get. And the reason? He doesn't read or write. My father's illiterate. The irony does not fall short on me. I can be poet laureate, but he'll never be able to read a single one of my poems. I take that for what it is, and I move forward knowing that it's a blessing because of where my family has been and where I'm going. I carry all of that with me to help me be a better writer. 

Keep up with Lupe Mendez's new poetry projects, upcoming readings, and programs to support emerging writers at his website, thepoetmendez.org.



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VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



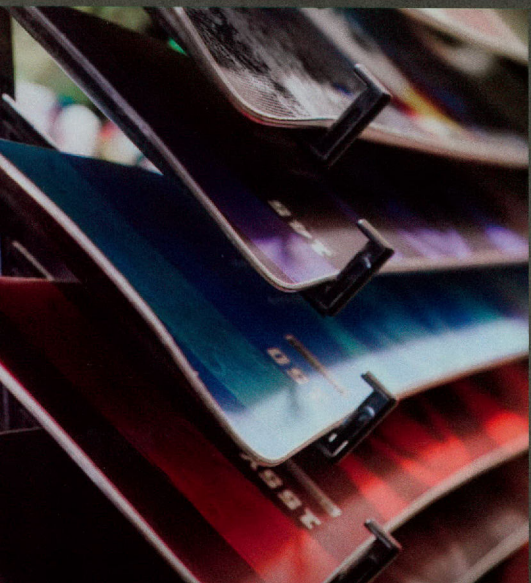
Boom Times

CORSICANA, 1921

The Beaton Hotel in Corsicana was once the largest hotel between Houston and Dallas. Corsicana native Ralph Beaton built the establishment in the 200 block of North Main Street in 1900 with money he earned in the oil business. A savvy businessman, Beaton founded the Corsicana Oil Development Co. in 1895 to drill for oil in what became Texas' first commercial oil field. He invested some of his earnings in the new hotel, which saw increasing demand as more Texans started traveling by automobile. In 1921, Beaton expanded the hotel, building a \$40,000 annex that increased its size to 80 rooms, as it appears in this photograph. Unfortunately, Beaton died just a year later. Hotelier Conrad Hilton bought the Beaton Hotel in 1923, making it the fifth property in his nascent empire. The business changed hands at least once more before being torn down in 1971. Corsicana Cleaners & Laundry Service now occupies the space where the Beaton once stood. 📌

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

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