

# TEXAS

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TRAVEL  
MAGAZINE  
OF TEXAS

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FIELDS

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THE STATE

FOREVER

MARCH 2022

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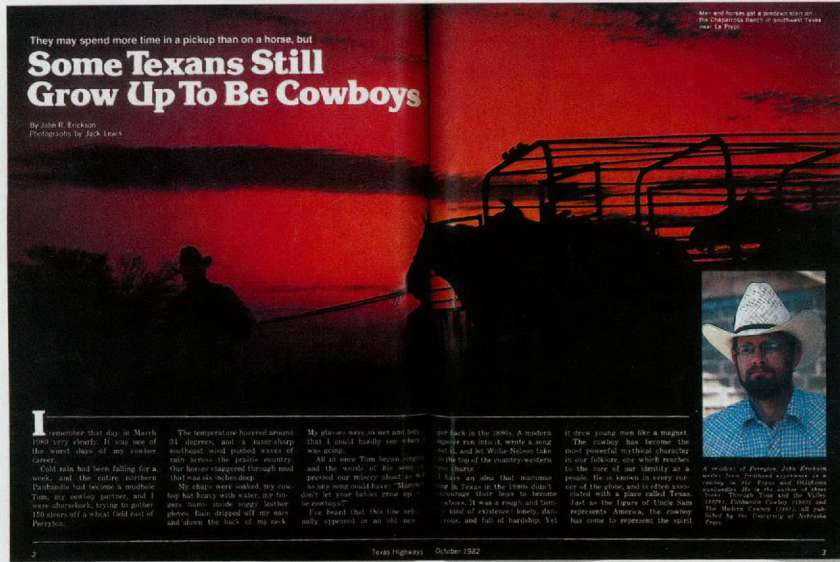
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# NOTE



They may spend more time in a pickup than on a horse, but

## Some Texans Still Grow Up To Be Cowboys

By John R. Erickson  
Photographs by Jack Lewis

I remember that day in March 1968 very clearly. It was one of the worst days of my winter career. Cold rain had been falling for a week, and the entire northern Panhandle had become a mudhole. Tom, my cowboy partner, and I were determined to get to Perryton off a whole field out of Perryton.

The temperature hovered around 31 degrees, and a monochromatic, misty, and pained westerly wind swept across the prairie country. They have suggested through mud that was six inches deep. My shoes were soaked, my cowboy hat heavy with water, and I felt miserable in the muddy, slushy slush. Rain dripped off my face and down the back of my neck.

My glasses were so wet and foggy that I could hardly see when we got to Perryton. All 22 cows Tom had been riding and the horse he had been riding our misery about as "I never saw mud like that. I can't let your babies come up to Perryton." I've heard that this line actually appeared on an old sign

back in the 1880s. A modern cowboy ran into it, wrote a song, and he and his wife became like the top of the country western you hear. I have an idea that millions of us, Texas in the years since, changed their lives to become what it was a dream of a kind of existence: hardy, daring, and full of hardship. Yet

it drew young men like a magnet. The cowboy has become the most powerful cultural character in our folklore, one which reaches to the core of our identity as a people. He is known in every corner of the globe and is often associated with a place called Texas. Just as the figure of Uncle Sam represents America, the cowboy has come to represent the spirit



A member of Perryton, John Erickson wrote the original copy of a column in the *Texas and Oklahoma Country* magazine, and the *Yellow* series. Erickson's cowboy story and The Western Cowboy (1981) will now be published by the University of Nebraska Press.

John Erickson (inset right) wrote about the cowboy lifestyle for the September 1982 issue

## Ranching, Writing, and Cowdogs

Like many Texans, John Erickson has strong ties to the land that reared him. Despite short stints in Denver and Boston during his college years, the beloved Texas author has lived in the Panhandle most of his life. In fact, if it weren't for his affinity for the region, generations of Texans might never have had the chance to fall in love with Hank the Cowdog, the main character in Erickson's popular book series. Hank's first misadventure was part of a collection of short stories, *The Devil in Texas and Other Cowboy Tales*, self-published by Erickson in 1982 through his imprint, Maverick Books. Called "Confessions of a Cowdog," the Hank story wasn't even Erickson's favorite of the bunch. But his former neighbors in his hometown of Perryton let him know otherwise. "I decided to read the Hank story for the Perryton Rotary Club, and they just fell out of their chairs laughing," Erickson recalls. "After the program a guy came loping up and said, 'You need to do more with that dog.' If he hadn't said that I don't know that I would have ever recognized that Hank had star quality."

A teacher at an elementary school in the tiny town of Spearman, near Perryton, clued him in to Hank's appeal to children a few books into the series. His original intended audience was adults involved in agriculture—he thought the humor was too subtle for kids. "I did the program [at Spearman] and sure enough, the kids laughed in most of the right places, and I stopped arguing with teachers and librarians."

Seventy-six Hank books and upward of 9 million copies sold later, Erickson's day-to-day life hasn't changed much. He still writes for about four hours every morning and otherwise tends to his M-Cross Ranch in the northeastern Panhandle.

His life as a rancher prompted his story on Page 84 reflecting on the fifth anniversary of the devastating Perryton Fire that burned 318,000 acres, including the Erickson ranch. With help from their neighbors, Erickson and his wife, Kris, have since rebuilt. His story details how the region continues to grapple with the ever-present reality of wildfires.

Erickson's account marks the return of his byline to our pages for the first time in 40 years. Back in 1982, when he was a fledgling author, he wrote a handful of stories for *Texas Highways*. Along with a September story, pictured above, about the cowboy lifestyle, founding editor Frank Lively commissioned him to cover rodeos in Pecos and Wichita Falls. While his early freelancing days were short-lived, he doesn't plan to hang up his hat anytime soon. "I have no intention of retiring as a rancher or writer," Erickson says. "When you love your work, every day is a vacation."

*Emily R Stone*

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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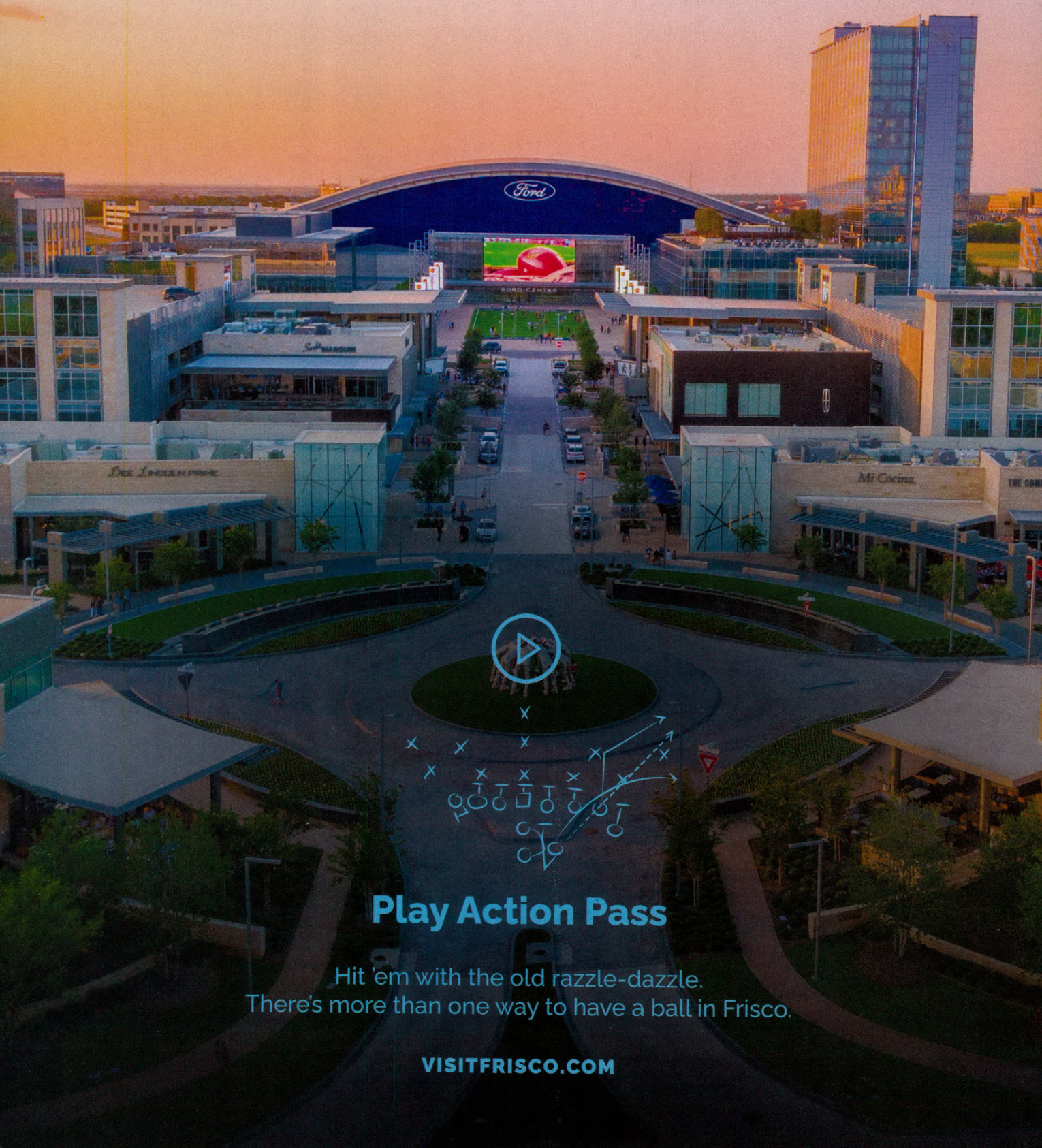


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VOLUME 69 . NUMBER 3

# MARCH

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## Wildflower Fields Forever

"Wildflower season" may be synonymous with spring, but it doesn't have to be. You just have to know where to look.

*By Joe Nick Patoski  
Photographs by Theresa DiMenno*

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## The Art of Spring

Inspired by Texas' bountiful blooms, six artists interpret the natural beauty of our state's flowers in a variety of mediums.

*By Clayton Maxwell*

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## Deep Like the River

A meditative road trip along the winding path of the Rio Grande summons memories of a beloved cousin.

*By Roberto José Andrade Franco  
Photographs by Christ Chavez*

**BEACH EVENING**  
primrose sprout  
from the dunes on  
South Padre Island.



SHOP



DINE



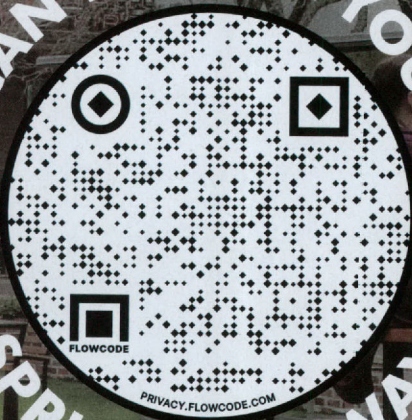
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# MARCH

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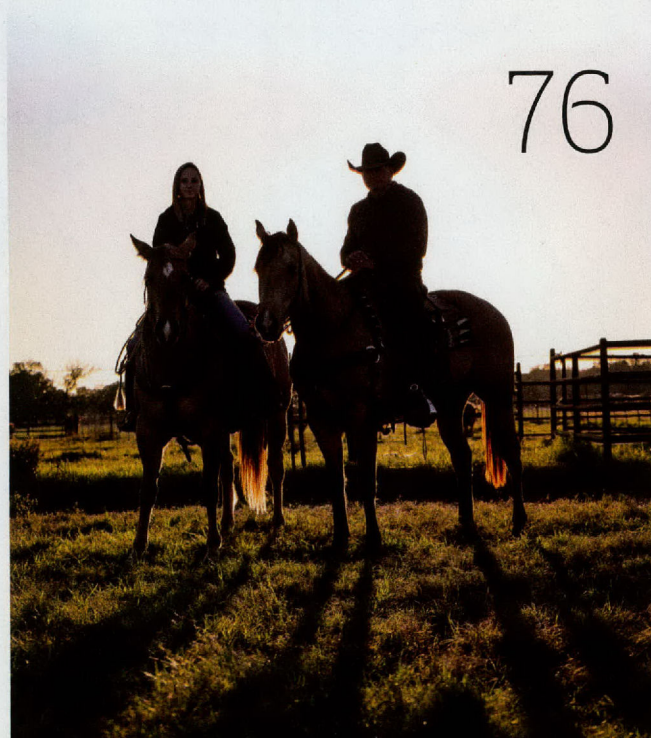
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**ON THE COVER**

Photograph by Theresa DiMenno



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# TRADITIONS

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## Behind the Story

Writer Dina Gachman has a new favorite wildflower: the ghost pipe. “When you really crouch down and look at it, it is just the coolest plant,” she says of the species she encountered in Nacogdoches while reporting “The Rogue Wildflower Hunters of Texas” (Page 27). “They’re otherworldly.” Gachman traveled to the Piney Woods to meet people who track down the rare plants that don’t get as much attention as bluebonnets or Indian paintbrushes. “They sounded like they were kind of like spies,” the Hutto resident recalls thinking of the group. The experience of looking closely for less-celebrated flowers changed her perspective on her surroundings. “I’ve become much more aware of everything on my own lawn,” she says. “It’s definitely caused me to look closer, which is actually really fun. I’m much more appreciative of native plants.” Gachman’s book of essays about grief, *So Sorry for Your Loss*, is set to be published in spring 2023.

## Featured Contributors



### Lauren Hough

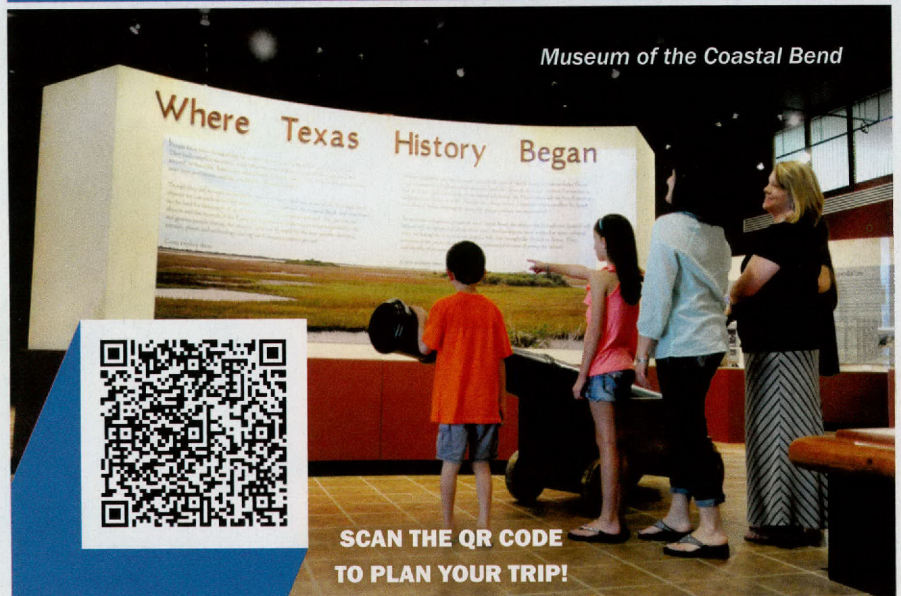
The Austin-based writer traveled to the Panhandle town of Shamrock to find the truth about her grandfather’s tale of meeting Bonnie and Clyde in “Getaway Driver” (Page 18). “I thought this essay would be a fun way to check out the town and find out more,” Hough says. “Turns out, I found a way to honor my Grandpa Chuck.” Hough is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the essay collection *Leaving Isn’t the Hardest Thing*. She’s been an airman in the U.S. Air Force, a barista, a bartender, and a cable guy. Her writing has appeared in *Granta*, *The Wrath-Bearing Tree*, *The Guardian*, and *HuffPost*.



### Luis G. Rendon

Rendon grew up in Laredo, and every visit home reveals another story worth telling about the oft-underreported borderlands. He wrote about Picate Mucho’s treats for “Sweet, Sour, and Oh So Spicy” (Page 71). “Owner Cathy Cortez is a young Tejano woman who has lived and breathed Laredo her entire life,” says the journalist now based in Brooklyn, New York. “She has taken these Mexican flavors of her youth, combined them with American candies she also grew up with, and is now part of this trend that is shaping culture that is distinctly Tex-Mex.” Rendon is a staff writer for *The Daily Beast*.

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Subscriptions are \$24.95 annually  
(\$39.95 foreign).

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Published monthly by the Travel Information Division of TxDOT

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## GATOR COUNTRY

Beaumont's *Gator Country* is the place to visit to get to know all about scaly reptiles - and even hold a baby gator. The park is home to nearly 600 alligators but the headliners are Big Al and Big Tex, the largest alligators in captivity in Texas - certified by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. Both gators weigh in at 1,000 pounds and almost 14 feet in length.



## PUBLIC GARDENS

Take in the beauty of Beaumont, Texas with a visit to our beautiful *Botanical Gardens*. A public garden located within Tyrrell Park, which includes the Warren Loose Conservatory - the second largest public garden in Texas. See camellias, modern and antique roses, bromeliads, and native plants connected by a paved walkway offering plenty of benches to sit and relax. For a certified "Green" experience, *Shangri La Botanical Gardens & Nature Center* in nearby Orange, is a perfect place to enjoy gardens bursting with fragrance and color. Its unique wetland ecosystem offers sanctuary to plants and animals in a Platinum-Level LEED Certified atmosphere.



## SOUTH TEXAS STATE FAIR

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**Pictured: Korey Thomas of The Remnant of Nawlins carries on Cajun cooking traditions reborn in the wake of Hurricane Katrina**

# MERGE



I've been over the Pecos River Bridge 100 times [Sightseer, January]. I love that region and the picnic areas. It's like you're entering a gateway to a whole new geographic zone of Texas.  
*Andrew Kubera, Hallettsville*

### On the Road

I love *Texas Country Reporter* ["Hop In and Travel," January]. I've learned about so many wonderful Texans and places I would never otherwise have known.  
 @Timpanist

### Horny Toads

We're trying to go back to native grasses and wildflowers in our yard to help them ["Our Lovable Lizards," January]. We had a mating pair last summer. Hopefully we'll see more soon!  
 Christie Morrow, Big Spring

### Lost in the Pines

When I grew up there, Bastrop had just over 3,000 people ["Six and a Half Million Seedlings Sprouting," January]. I love knowing it's coming into its own.  
 @mo.wright

### Cat Person

As much as I admire anyone who can successfully travel with a cat, I do take exception with the statement that "Any cat is adaptable with enough patience" ["The Ultimate Guide to Traveling With Pets in Texas," February]. I traveled between Fredericksburg and Pagosa Springs, Colorado, for nine years, usually with three cats. Two of them have a total aversion to car travel and have never gotten over it. They have motion sickness and are sick before I can even get out of the driveway. I tried herbal remedies, prescription drugs, and CBD oil for cats. Nothing really worked. Patience is important, but my cats didn't get the message.

*Sue Ford, Fredericksburg*

### A Helping Paw

It was so nice to see the article about Guide Dogs of Texas in the February issue ["Service With a Wag"]. My son Marshall received his dog, Duncan, about eight years ago after graduation from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. He used him for

his position as a travel trainer with the Corpus Christi Transportation Authority and has now moved to a new position with the State of Texas as a blind children's specialist. Marshall takes Duncan everywhere he goes when working. He teaches the kids how to respect Duncan while in "uniform" (harness) and that when the harness is off, he is out of uniform and can be pet. Duncan is a great icebreaker when meeting new kids.

*Dee Dee Burns, Seguin*

### Out and About

Wow! January's issue with your 2022 bucket list was right on. As hikers and nature lovers, we are always looking for convenient, beautiful, and serene places to enjoy the outdoors. We made an easy day trip to the Robert L.B. Tobin Land Bridge [in San Antonio] from New Braunfels and give it a 10+ in every category. The trails were well marked, the staff was incredibly friendly, and we never saw one piece of trash. Next on our list are the painted churches in Schulenburg, which are practically in our backyard, and

we have talked about visiting for years. A Texas-size thank you for your continued wonderful publication.

*Sandi and Gary Appelt, Brenham*

### In Step

I enjoyed the reflective commentary by Kameron Dunn in "With Whomever Will Have Me" [January]. I've been to many joints in Austin but never heard of the Broken Spoke. However, I really enjoyed the piece and could actually imagine what the place looked like through the words written by Dunn. After reading Dunn's piece, I recognized that in many ways, folks in Texas get along quite well with those they have differed from over time. I may never wear one of the four cowboy hats I bought down there real often, but when I do it always makes me feel better. My lesson learned down there is that there is more that unites us than divides us. I think perhaps the Broken Spoke should use Dunn in its marketing campaign. He sells the place and Austin quite well for an Okie.

*Sal Giarratani, Boston, Massachusetts*



## Firewheels in the Sun

Photographer Theresa DiMenno roams Texas' backroads every spring in search of wildflowers to document. Staying closer to home in March 2020, she found this field of firewheel blooms near a South Austin retention pond. On a rainy and overcast day, the evening sun eventually broke through the clouds. "The landscape was extraordinary in its brilliance," DiMenno recalls. This year, she is hoping for colorful blooms in the Hill Country, which received decent October rainfall. "I've got my eye on a little cabin west of Fredericksburg I'd like to stay in for a few days as a home base," she says.









# Poteet

Jim Collums has helped put his farming town's strawberries on the map

By Omar Gallaga



**JIM COLLUMS**, who grows strawberries, makes wine, and restores windmills, served as director of the Poteet Strawberry Festival for 16 years.

**W**hen he's not out collecting old windmills, Jim Collums can most often be found at Poteet Country Winery, located on the former dairy farm where he grew up. The farm sells wines, jams, ice cream, iced tea, and even beer made from the homegrown strawberries that give Poteet its designation as the "Strawberry Capital of Texas." Collums ran a utility construction business before deciding to devote his time to farming and making wine from strawberries and mustang grapes. Named for the town's first postmaster, Poteet has been an agricultural hub since the early 1900s when local farmers tapped into artesian wells for irrigation. Sweet strawberries became the signature local crop, leading to the founding of the Poteet Strawberry Festival in 1948. From 1980 to 1996, Collums served as festival director, spearheading the event's move in 1980 from downtown to its own festival grounds, which host more than 100,000 visitors annually. Guests who make their way to Poteet Country Winery for tastings and tours also get an inside look at Collums' side business of windmill restoration—vintage structures rest across the property in varying stages of completion.

### Got Milk?

"I've always loved the country. Growing up, I guess I was really lucky to be on the farm here—I think that's part of it. And I never did give a second thought to having to get up in the morning to milk cows. That's how my dad was raised. He thought kids were supposed to work. I had a twin sister and an older sister. My dad never made them milk cows."

### Country People

"People in Poteet are good, friendly people. Poteet hasn't really grown a lot like some other towns. City people haven't moved in here much, so they're still basically country people, working people. There are about 24 strawberry growers in the area."

### Strawberry Fields Forever

"We're blessed with two things around the Poteet area. Strawberries require acidic soil like the sandy loam we have. They don't grow well in dark ground or clay-type soil. In other parts of the state, the water is too alkaline for them to grow well. The water has to be acidic, so it has to have a low pH level. We get our acidic water from Carrizo Springs."

### Table Talk

"La Mesa is where we always go to meet for breakfast in the morning. It's a little café in town, and there's usually about 30 people there. You can find out all the new business, and who's involved in what. This morning, I went to the coffee shop and ate a taco and got the news. There were strawberry growers and fire department guys."

### Windmill Collection

"I've got 26 windmills over at the Longhorn Museum in Pleasanton. [The exhibit opened last year at the museum, 8 miles south-east of Poteet.] I tried to get some groups in Poteet interested, but Pleasanton built me a big building to put it in. Once I filled it up with windmills, the mayor said, 'You could have used a bigger building.'"

### Sweet Success

"The first year at the festival grounds [1980], attendance was about 55,000. In 2019, we ticketed 146,000. People always ask me, 'How did you make the Strawberry Festival grow so big?' You have to do two things to make something grow. You've got to let people know about it. We put up 20 billboards in San Antonio. We also have billboards in Corpus Christi and Houston. The second thing is give them something worthwhile so they come back again and tell their neighbors about it. We have plenty of entertainment for the family. The carnival starts Thursday night, and there are 14 stages with big entertainers."

### Farm to Cone

"I gave H-E-B the idea for the Poteet strawberry ice cream back in 1980. Just before the last festival, I found out H-E-B wasn't going to deal with our strawberry growers anymore. So we decided to make it ourselves. We tried about 10 different recipes, and we built a plant to make it. Everything we could make was sold at the festival—over 3,000 pints. This year, we're planning to do about 25,000 of them." 🍦



## TOWN TRIVIA



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3,437



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

1



YEAR FOUNDED:

1911



NEAREST BIG TOWN:

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30 miles north



MARQUEE EVENTS:

Poteet Strawberry Festival, April 22-24



MAP IT:

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9199 State Highway 16



# Getaway Driver

A grandpa's tall tale sends a Panhandle native back to the scene of the crime

By Lauren Hough



I

I'm in a doll museum in Shamrock, and I am not prepared to face down the hundreds of ceramic figures staring at me from every shelf and corner. I can't believe the curator just let me in here, told me a little history of the place, then wished me luck in my research—leaving me alone to deal with the ghosts. She's out on the porch talking to a couple old-timers, probably about the fall weather or football or whatever you talk about on porches. But I'm convinced they're talking about that writer from Austin who was, as my grandpa used to say, raised on concrete. They've given no indication they think this of me. But the second I

stepped out of my car, the wind grabbed my Red Sox hat off my head, as it does, as anyone from the Panhandle knows it will. I imagine they enjoyed the slapstick spectacle of a city kid who doesn't have the sense to hold onto her hat and now must chase it down the sidewalk.

This is already one of my favorite museums, and I've been to my share—in London and Berlin and Osaka and Rome and Cairo, and to the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum down the road in Canyon. It's always irked me when other tourists show up on the day I visit to block my view and laugh inappropriately and talk too loudly. It's not that I think I'm special and should be allowed to wander freely, unperturbed by tourists. No. It's exactly that. I enjoy history. I'm here to learn. They're here to take a few selfies for Instagram. I should have the place to myself.

So, when Raquel Riggs, the curator of the Pioneer West Museum, gave me a quick briefing on the place and left me to explore, I couldn't believe my luck. I was finally touring a museum the way I'd always intended—alone. The museum is housed in the Reynolds Hotel, a stately brick Mission Revival structure built in the 1920s, during the oil and railroad boom, and named after local attorney Marion Reynolds. Each of the 25 rooms in the museum focuses on a different subject or era—fossils and arrows; barbed wire and the railroad; the pride of Wheeler, astronaut Alan Bean, the fourth man on the moon—with every conceivable surface chock-full of artifacts. There's a fort, a chapel, a barbershop, a general store, a dental office. Hard to believe they've fit this much into one little hotel on what used to be a main street.

According to Raquel, everything in the museum was donated by locals. From what I can tell when I get up to the second floor, someone in town had a habit of collecting dolls that bordered on the maniacal. I'm so discombobulated by the dolls—yellow hair in ringlets and complicated braids, hoop skirts, velvet coats, tiny white aprons, delicately painted bow lips and blush, and eyes that follow you—I've forgotten why I'm here. I hope they host a haunted house in October.

Downstairs, in a hallway, are the framed newspaper clippings to remind me why I'm here—Bonnie and Clyde and Grandpa Chuck. My grandpa, thankfully, isn't mentioned in the clippings. He wouldn't be. From what I can tell, if his story's true, he was just a little kid.

**My grandpa has always** dressed like a farmer. He favors overalls or Wranglers

strung up by suspenders, pearl-snap shirts, boots, and a short-brim Stetson. When he went to church or dinner, he'd wear what he called his "uptown" suspenders, slimmer and printed with paisley or little flowers. When I was little, he smelled like pipe tobacco, and he'd blow smoke rings for me to slap apart before they floated to the ceiling. That smell has always reminded me of him. There were years I didn't know him at all—divorce and remarriage, different states and countries. I didn't know, for example, he was from Texas, not Denver, where he lived in a split-level and ran his own barbershop. I didn't know, until recently, that he's always wanted to rob a bank.

When my grandpa needed some extra help, he moved in with my dad here in Austin. When I moved to Austin, five years ago, I'd watch him in the afternoons so my dad could run errands. He didn't always

know who I was. Alzheimer's is a hell of a disease. But I noticed if I got him talking about the old days, his mind was sharp and full of stories. I'd pour him a Lone Star and every time, like a ritual, he'd ask me if I was interested in robbing a bank. I told him I could be the getaway driver. He said, no—he's driving. My grandpa's legally blind. I picture us making a getaway at 12 miles per hour. He told me we needed one more guy. "Let's go tomorrow," he said.

At first, I thought he was kidding about the whole bank-robbing thing. But I asked, once, if he was serious. We were sitting on the porch, watching the dogs wrestle, drinking the beer I'd snuck in for him. My dad doesn't like him to have too many—bad for his cholesterol. I think being in his 90s is probably bad for his cholesterol. So, I sneak him a beer on occasion. He's earned it. That afternoon, I asked him if




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he was kidding about robbing a bank. He wiped the condensation off his glass then used it to flatten his wispy hair. He said, "Oh, no. I'm serious as judge. And they've got it coming. They took my horse."

I asked, "The bank?"

He said that was back in Texola. He mixes up town names occasionally. Sometimes he tells me Shamrock is where he had the horse. I do know, in the mid-1930s, the bank took the ranch in Shamrock and his family moved to Texola, just across the Oklahoma border, on what's now Interstate 40.

I'd been asking him about the Dust Bowl, an obsession of mine. I like writing Dust Bowl stories, and he lived through it. That my grandparents survived it and told these stories when I was a kid may be the root of my obsession. We had to listen to the stories until someone told us to go play outside, but don't get dirty. I was always

only half listening back then. Now, stories need detail, and my grandpa has all the details—how to catch a bunny for dinner by jabbing a strand of unraveled barbed wire in the hole, how his job was to herd the chickens into the house to ride out a duster, how his mom papered the walls with newspaper in a desperate attempt to keep the dust out.

He'd often wind up talking about his horse named Eagle he rode to school. When school got out, Eagle would be waiting for him. Didn't even have to tie him up. But until that afternoon in 2018, he'd never mentioned the bank. He said they took the farm, and maybe they had a right. But they had no right to take his horse.

I thought that was it for a moment. Stories end like that sometimes, drift into nothing, and he'll ask about supper. But my grandpa grabbed a tissue from his chest pocket, and I saw he was crying. He

said there wasn't anything they could do. The bank took the farm, and then they took his horse. They had no right. "Never trust a bank," he said.

I wanted to change the subject. I'd never seen my grandpa cry. I asked about Shamrock, and he said, "Bonnie and Clyde." Like he'd been trying to remember the name of an actor. But we hadn't been talking about movies.

"What?" I asked.

"Bonnie and Clyde. They were hiding in the barn."

"Bonnie and Clyde?"

He laughed and I knew he was well aware of the bomb he'd dropped. I asked, "Oh, they were bank robbers, right?" I was trying to remember what I knew about Bonnie and Clyde and came up with, *I think Warren Beatty was in the movie.*

He said, "They robbed banks, all right. Were pretty good at it, too."



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I thought, well, at least we're not talking about the horse now. Maybe this was a story he'd heard. Then he added, "They gave me a box of chocolate bars."

I nearly spit my beer. He laughed and took another sip of his and said it again. "Bonnie and Clyde." I waited. He was enjoying this.

"They were hiding in the barn," he said. He was looking off into the middle distance like he could see the barn now.

"Bonnie and Clyde?"

"Yep, I brought them their supper," he said. "I was only 7 at the time."

I waited for him to continue, but when he didn't, I asked, "And they gave you a candy bar?"

That perked him up. "No, a whole box of candy bars. Chocolate bars. Hershey's. A whole box," he repeated. "Like this." And he held out his hands and formed a shoebox. He added, "My older

**My grandpa still enjoys a beer, but he doesn't know who I am. He no longer tells stories. All I've got is what he told me on those summer afternoons.**

brother—and this was really his deal—he showed them a way out of town, to avoid the sheriff."

And that was it. I asked him again and recorded part of it on my phone. I don't know why. I think now I just wanted proof.

When my dad got home and I told him the story, he said, "No, that was Dillinger." Like this was a story he'd heard a million times as a boy and hadn't thought about since. He was sure it was Dillinger. I told

him, "Dillinger was Chicago, Dad." He shrugged and said maybe he mixed it up. This was driving me nuts. I Googled "Bonnie and Clyde Shamrock" on my phone. All I could find was some info about a chase that ended with their car in the Red River and some locals helping them. The write-up said someone was shot.

My dad said that didn't sound right, that my grandpa would've mentioned the river or someone getting shot. He said he was pretty sure it was Dillinger anyway. I didn't show him the Wiki page for Dillinger.

**My grandpa's older now** than he was then—that's how aging works. He still enjoys a beer, but he doesn't know who I am. He no longer tells stories. All I've got is what he told me on those summer afternoons. Maybe that's why I got it into

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my head to drive up to Shamrock and find out if his story was real.

The drive from the Hill Country to the Panhandle might be one of those drives one can enjoy only if they're from the Panhandle. And I am—Amarillo. Which is to say, when the road flattens and widens, when the mesquite-dotted hills are replaced by flat brown fields of prairie grass, when the dirt turns red and the sky never ends and I swear I can see all the way to Colorado, I'm someone who'll pull over at the first Allsup's and fill a vat with Dr Pepper and order two burritos—yes, please, to the offer of hot sauce. It's a strange thing, driving up this edge of Texas—the High Plains and the Llano Estacado to the left, the canyons and the hills to the right, through one-street towns of close-built shops, many boarded up nowadays. I can still picture horses tied to the rails out front.

Outside the museum, Raquel asks me what I'm writing about. I tell her my grandpa's story, the main points anyway. She asks his name and says she doesn't know any Houghs around here. The old-timers chime in—don't know any Houghs. I say my grandpa's people weren't here long. They moved to Texola when the bank took the ranch. The old-timers say that's how it often happened. I think my grandpa's probably not the only one with a grudge against banks. Raquel asks if I've been to the U-Drop Inn.

If you Google "Shamrock, Texas," the Conoco Tower of the U-Drop Inn is the image you'll see, and for good reason. It's a beautifully preserved art deco building. If you wait in front of the tower longer than a minute, you'll see tourists get out of their cars and stand long enough to make sure their legs still work after hours in the car—that sprint from Oklahoma City

or Albuquerque, maybe Amarillo if they allowed themselves the rest. They take a couple pictures, check their screens, take a couple more. The tower's turquoise neon looks amazing on Instagram. This part of Shamrock, the road that used to be Route 66, still looks like 1955. The drive-up motels and auto repair shops. The hand-painted signs scrubbed dull by the wind. The ancient Chevies and Fords still glistening, polished by those who treasure these artifacts of the time before I-40 bypassed the town. The tourists take their photos then drive away.

The smart ones go inside before they hit the road again. Inside the U-Drop Inn, you'll find an info center in the large lobby of the old gas station—the shelves now lined with pamphlets, books, and local art. Through a door to the right, a small café. At the U-Drop, you get to meet Hazel and Oleta.

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Oleta Stone looks so familiar you're sure she's a distant aunt you met at a family barbecue a few years ago. You just can't quite place if she's on your dad's side or your mom's. She's warm like that. Like she knows you might be a little uncomfortable meeting all these new people, and she'll fix you a plate and introduce you to some cousins who'll play with you.

When I arrive at the U-Drop, Oleta's showing a couple tourists a mural on the back wall of the Pixar movie *Cars*. She's telling them how the scenery and buildings were all real places on Route 66. I

wander around looking at hats, T-shirts, a mannequin of a sheriff with handcuffs on his hip. The tourists leave, and Oleta asks if I need any help. I tell her I'm working on a story about my grandpa and ask about Bonnie and Clyde. She says I ought to check out the museum. She assures me Raquel will welcome me. I say I've been, and she says if I want to know more, I really should talk to Hazel.

Hazel Janssen's at the register and rings me up for a couple Route 66 bumper stickers. Oleta tells Hazel I'm a writer, and I swear I can hear the pride in her voice. Hazel's proud of me, too. I want to

stay awhile and soak up all this warmth. Maybe I miss my grandmothers. Hazel asks why I'm interested in Bonnie and Clyde, and I say I'm not really. I tell her about my grandpa. I tell her about my grandparents and how they survived the Dust Bowl and used to tell me stories. That the Dust Bowl—this disaster no one talks about—is an obsession of mine. For nearly 10 years, most of the 1930s, the entire middle of the country looked like the Sahara Desert. And anytime I mention it, all I get is a blank stare. Hazel says she was born in '35, the middle of the worst of it. Her mom used to cover her crib with a wet sheet so she wouldn't choke on the dust. I say this is what I mean. These details. We hear about those who left. We never hear from those who stayed. And people did stay. She locks eyes with me and says, "Some people couldn't afford to leave."

**I tell her about my grandparents and how they survived the Dust Bowl. That the Dust Bowl—this disaster no one talks about—is an obsession of mine.**

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THE FIRST LADY

Hazel says she knew the lady Clyde shot. Her name was Gladys Cartwright. The Cartwrights and another family, the Pritchards, had seen the Barrow gang's car go into the Red River. The Pritchard and Cartwright men rescued the passengers from the sinking car—two men and a woman. Clyde and his brother, Buck, were all right. Bonnie suffered burns to her leg. They all wound up at the Pritchard farmhouse, where the gang held the families hostage while they treated Bonnie's wounds. Gladys, only 19 at the time and holding an infant in her arms, had reached for something above a cabinet, and seeing a threat, Clyde shot her hand. A newspaper clipping from the time says Buck shot her. In any case, her hand took a load.

Hazel says Gladys used to play piano, was pretty good at it, too. The gang's car is still there, under the river, swallowed by

the quicksand. But Gladys never played piano again.

I tell her I'm pretty sure that wasn't my family. All my grandpa said was they were hiding in the barn. Hazel says it's likely. The Barrow gang was all over town for a time. They even ate in the café next door.

"I'm not sure I'll ever know if it's true," I say of my grandpa's tale. "Why wouldn't it be true?" Hazel responds. "It's his story." I agree and say maybe I just wanted to honor a little part of his past. He's my last grandparent. I wonder now how many other stories I've lost.

I resist the urge to hug them when I leave.

Next door, at the café, I order a cheese-cake and a bottle of Coke. I'll regret the sugar crash later, but I can't resist a bottled Coke. The place is so well preserved—a low café bar lined with short chrome stools, an ornate tin ceiling, soft pleather

booths under the windows—you'd think they wrapped it in plastic 70 years ago and just unwrapped it last night. The story goes, Clyde asked the waitress here about a slot machine. She told him it was just emptied, in case he was thinking of robbing it. They bought lunch and paid. I wonder which booth they sat in. I wonder how my grandpa's family escaped unscathed so the only story he's got is about a box of candy bars, while a few miles down the road, a woman who played piano never got to play again.

I'd never been off the highway in Shamrock. But I have a video of my grandpa telling me a story about Bonnie and Clyde. I thought this essay would be a fun way to check out the town and find out more. Turns out, I found a way to honor my grandpa. Charles Hough was born in 1927. He died in Austin on Jan. 14, while I was finishing this story. And I believe every word of it. **L**

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# DRIVE



**A GHOST PIPE,**  
Emily Dickinson's  
favorite flower,  
grows in the wild in  
Nacogdoches.

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**FROM LEFT:** Peter Loos, Brandy Midura, author Dina Gachman, Suzanne Birmingham Walker, Adam Black, and Dawn Stover search for seeds.

# The Rogue Wildflower Hunters of Texas

The intrepid crew goes where few others will in search of the state's most unusual plants

By Dina Gachman

**T**hroughout the year, a small group of botanists and wildflower enthusiasts regularly text each other GPS coordinates from across Texas. When the text comes, they mobilize. Their mission? Save some of the rarest flora in the state. For members like Michael Eason, head of San Antonio Botanical Garden's rare plant conservation program and author of *Wildflowers of Texas*, heading to remote locations to save endangered plants is a passion.

"Part of it is also insanity," he admits. My quest to go rogue with these folks

turns out to be more difficult than I expected. They're often out in the field, so they're hard to pin down. After months of trying, I prevail when Adam Black, a botanical and horticulture consultant, texts me a map with GPS coordinates and tells me to meet them in Nacogdoches on a Thursday in November. I throw snake boots into my trunk and drive out of Hutto on the country roads until I hit US 79, heading northeast toward the pine forests.

When I arrive, Black is at the gate to Winston 8 Ranch, a 3,000-acre tree farm that's been part of Simon Winston's family for generations. Less than 3% of land in Texas is public, so Black and the others rely on private landowners. Winston has been inviting plant lovers onto his land for years. In addition to planting pines for restorative purposes, Winston performs prescribed burns, which happen to allow dormant native plants to "breathe a sigh of relief and come up," Black explains.

Eventually, the rest of the group materializes: Brandy Midura, a pharmacist who loves photographing rare plants; Suzanne Birmingham Walker, a biologist and consulting forester; Peter Loos, a botanist and plant propagator; and Dawn Stover, an agronomist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Stover is careful about who she invites on these excursions since relationships with private landowners like Winston are crucial to her work. "I don't want just any Joe Blow out here," she says.

Eason, who couldn't make the Nacogdoches trip, had told me the same thing when I first reached out to him in the summer of 2021: "You have to spend some time with us before we'll start sharing information." I had wanted to find out what drives people like him to spend hours crawling around in the muck searching for tiny bluets or featherleaf desert peonies.

He suggests I talk with Megan O'Connell, a conservation research botanist at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas in Fort Worth, who is part of a statewide effort to conserve native plants. O'Connell collects, catalogs, and

replants rare wildflowers so they don't disappear due to factors like climate change, urbanization, and unsustainable farming and ranching.

At her office, she takes me into the Herbarium, a room with giant lockers full of botany records dating to 1791. Unlike most of us who seek out pretty blue-bonnets and Indian paintbrushes in the spring for an Instagram pic, she's paying attention to species like *Dalea hallii*, or Hall's prairie clover, a native plant that's a crucial part of the ecosystem. "People want to conserve things that are cute, like pandas," O'Connell says. "Some flowers are not very charismatic, though."

In addition to using the iNaturalist app, O'Connell relies on word-of-mouth from active plant hunters like Eason to find rare species. In the plant conservation community, there exists a "group consciousness and continual conversation," O'Connell says. They are constantly letting each other know when they stumble upon something worth seeking out. "It's very collaborative," she says.

O'Connell once went on an orchid-hunting trip with Eason and Black in search of the rare *Hexalectris* orchid. They didn't even have to trek off the grid in South Texas, where it's known to be found. Instead, they crawled around on their hands and knees and found it in an urban park in the middle of Dallas, a spot where the orchid blooms at certain times of the year.

"Rescuing plants is triage. It's reactionary," O'Connell says. "You find out where something is, and you go."

**After we finish some homemade fig cake** courtesy of Winston, he rounds up two vehicles. I hop in a Polaris with Midura, Walker, and Stover and ask them about the riskiest thing they've done in search of rare flora. Midura tells me she hiked a mountain in Spain alone looking for dewy pine on a day so windy she thought her kneecaps might break from the falls she was taking. Walker talks wistfully about a trip to Ireland, where she trekked through bogs on a rainy day searching for orchids. Later, Loos

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**Lamb's quarters** is an annual, edible plant that can produce up to 75,000 seeds. It looks like a common weed, but it restores nutrients to the soil and can be used for nutritional or medicinal purposes. The small flowers, held above the leaves in tight spikes, can be found across the state from spring to fall.

**Texas poppy-mallow** is listed on the federal and state endangered plant list. The blooms look like dark red tulips, and they're found in grasslands or shrublands in deep, sandy soil along the upper Colorado River. The best time to see them, if you're lucky, is May to June.

**Kentucky lady's slipper orchids** boast delicate pale, yellow flowers that look like ... a lady's slipper. The perennial, terrestrial orchids have been spotted in the deep Piney Woods of East Texas in April, and they can grow to be over 3 feet in height. Their global conservation status is "vulnerable."



**FROM LEFT:** Red buckeye seeds at Winston 8 Ranch; Adam Black photographs some ghost pipes; a bag of red buckeye seeds, ready for planting.

mentions he once hung upside down off a 50-foot bluff in Louisiana's Tunica Hills with a rope around his waist to collect oakleaf hydrangea.

A few minutes into the drive, Stover spots some button gayfeather and we stop so she can gather seeds. She puts them into a paper bag as the group roams around and makes taxonomy jokes that go right over my head. I'm amazed by the fearlessness of each person. Before I can get out of the front seat, they're off into the forest, knee-deep in brush. No one is wearing snake boots. I don't want to seem like a wimp, so I follow their lead, praying that a rattlesnake isn't nearby.

Since it's November, we find some beautyberry, false foxglove, wax myrtle, azaleas, pink-scale blazing star, and the invasive Chinese tallow. "I refuse to call it a popcorn tree," says Loos with disgust. He despises this nonnative species.

If Loos is the elder statesman and philosopher of the group, Black is the lone

wanderer. He has a knack for disappearing and discovering the most unique species in the oddest of places. "My whole life is basically plants," Black says. "Before I could talk, I'd gravitate toward lichens."

At another stop, Loos points out *Ilex vomitoria*, commonly known as yaupon, a plant Cherokee and Caddo tribes in the area once made into tea and then vomited up in purification rituals. "I was not a happy camper the first time I tried it," Loos says. Shortly after that, when he hands me some mountain mint and tells me to eat it, I'm a little wary because the word vomitoria is still fresh in my mind. But out of respect, I eat the mint. It's like chewing on a leaf dunked in Listerine.

"Where's sasquatch?" says Loos of Black, who has wandered off again. We find him crouched underneath a tree, taking photos of something that has him rapt. As we approach, I see a small clump of white flowers. Is it an elusive orchid? Mushrooms? We all get closer, and



Midura yelps, “Ghost pipes!”

Ghost pipes—“the preferred flower of life,” according to poet Emily Dickinson—are some of the oddest wildflowers I’ve ever seen. Black explains they have no chlorophyll and indirectly derive nutrients from the tree via a fungus that grows on the tree’s roots. They seem like they’ve had the color drained right out of them.

Black eventually manages to find a single, tiny ladies’ tresses orchid nestled in the tall grass. How he spotted it, I have no idea. But there it was. A lone orchid among the pines.

The possibilities for discovery are endless. There are about 5,000 native plants in Texas, according to Scooter Cheatham, who in 1971 founded the Austin-based Useful Wild Plants of Texas project, which publishes scientific volumes of wild plants. But that number is always in flux. “While we’re talking, someone may have found another one,” Cheatham says.

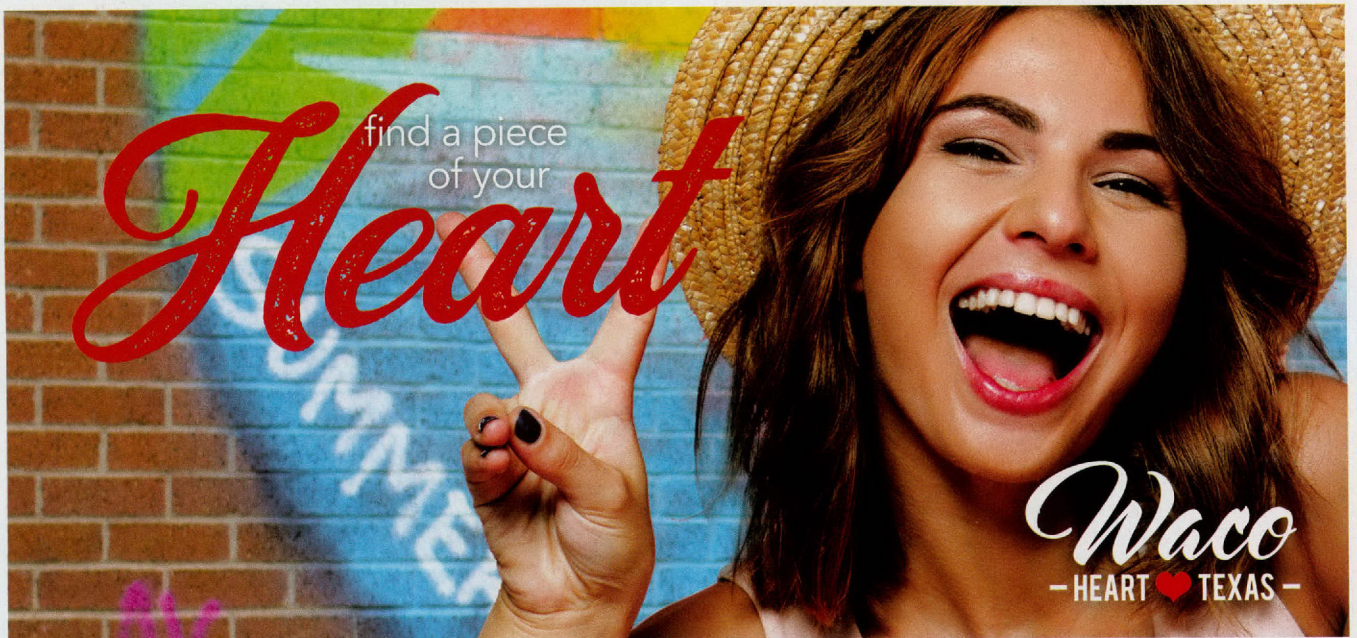


Before we head back to the cabin, Winston requests we make one last stop to check out a red buckeye plant. It’s not in bloom, but you wouldn’t know it by the way everyone fawns over the thing.

“I see buckeyes every year, and I still act like I’ve never seen one,” Walker says. Stover pulls off several large, smooth brown seeds and hands me two. They tell me to rub them together for good luck

and put them in my pocket.

We say our goodbyes, and I leave Nacogdoches intent on planting the seeds on my land. As I drive, I search the medians and country roads for wildflowers, even though it’s fall and nothing flashy is in bloom. I know there’s something magical out there, though, because I remember something Black told me: “If you stop and look, a whole world will open up.”



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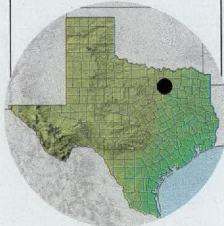


# From Russia With Flair

Vera Vasiley creates one-of-a-kind Western wear

By Andrea Luttrell

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Clothing designer Vera Vasiley's Instagram feed boasts a photo of pop star Gwen Stefani sparkling in a rhinestone bra and hot pants. Hugging Stefani's shoulders is one of Vasiley's bespoke creations—a pink Western-style shirt embroidered with bright blue cacti, a cascade of silver fringe tumbling from the sleeves. Though some might be intimidated working with superstars, Vasiley knows her own worth. "People don't understand," she says, "I'm the biggest celebrity in my world."

Vasiley hails from the Russian city of Astrakhan, just north of the Caspian Sea, where she studied art and theater design in the late 1970s. Marriage to an American brought her to Fort Worth in the '80s. When she arrived, she didn't speak English or drive a car, but she knew her way around a cut of fabric, a sewing machine, and an embroidery needle. In the early '90s, she opened Rifle Range, now called V-Atelier, to cater to the scene. "When you are in Fort Worth, you start doing Western wear," Vasiley explains.

She embraced cowboy couture, creating custom shirts, pants, and skirts while teaching herself how to make patterns, cut, sew, embroider, crochet, and even tool leather. Now, local luminaries like Kit Moncrief and Elaine Agather of the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo wear her designer duds, as do country music stars like Miranda Lambert, Jon Pardi, and Alan Jackson. Since the mid '90s, she has sold her wares at M.L. Leddy's, Fort Worth's renowned bootmaker and saddlery. A simple shirt with hand stitching can cost \$745 while an embroidered shirt can run up to \$3,600. This spring, her offerings will be on display at the National Cowgirl Museum in Fort Worth for the "Dare To Wear" exhibit.

Vasiley draws inspiration from nature, with wildflowers and succulents gracing her original designs. Her shirts also feature hyper-detailed images of spurs, horseshoes, and *calacas*—Día de los Muertos skeletons—playing acoustic guitars. Each item requires so many hours Vasiley refuses to count them. "I even take work to my bed!" Laughing, she adds, "One thing I know for sure is I'm not charging enough." **L**

6

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# Anatomy of a Bluebonnet

A closer look at *Lupinus texensis*, our Texas state flower

By Jacqueline Knox

**1 FLOWER** Up to 50 pea-like flowers, usually blue at the bottom and white at the top, form each of the bluebonnet's signature blooms. The flower's dark blue color takes a bit of work from the plant, as no plant pigment is truly blue. The blue hue results from other, more common pigments mixing and the chemicals in the flower's environment modifying its pH. Bluebonnets aren't always blue, either. White, violet, and pink flowers can develop naturally through genetic mutations or selection. Jerry Parsons of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service selectively bred bluebonnets to create a variety of colors, including a maroon flower as an ode to Texas A&M University.

**2 STEM** A winter annual, the bluebonnet germinates and sprouts in one year, flowering the following spring. During the fall and winter, the plant grows a rosette of leaves flat on the ground before "bolting"—sprouting a stem with florets on it—in late February or early March. The stem usually grows to be about 7 to 12 inches.

**3 TAPROOT** The plant's growth comes from the taproot below the rosette. A storage organ, the taproot reserves energy that will be used for flowering and fruiting. Rhizobium bacteria in the soil form nodules on the roots that convert nitrogen into a form the plant can use. This improves plant growth and enhances the soil with nitrogen once the plant dies.

**4 SEED** Texas bluebonnets are explosively dehiscent, meaning that when the fruit matures, it pops open and slings seeds up to 20 feet away. According to Joe Marcus, the Native Plants of North America Program coordinator for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, bluebonnet seeds are best sown in late May or early June, since that is when the flowers naturally scatter their seeds. The seeds typically germinate in September and October.

**5 ENVIRONMENT** Bluebonnets don't compete well with other plants. They grow best on open ground and in direct sunlight. Drought tolerant, the plants rot if watered too much and grow well in soil with a neutral to slightly basic pH. "The Texas bluebonnet really only wants to grow in Texas," Marcus says. "It'll grow a little bit outside of Texas, but it's a true-blue Texan."

**6 COMPANION INSECTS** While bees rely on bluebonnets for nectar and pollen, there are not a lot of other animals or insects that depend on the state flower. In fact, the leaves and seeds of the plant can be poisonous if ingested, causing many grazing animals—and humans—to steer clear. However, there are certain species of butterfly—including the gray hairstreak, northern cloudywing, painted and American lady, Henry's elfin, and orange sulphur—that use the plant as a larval host. 

**6**

Number of bluebonnet species that are considered the state flower

**64.75**

Height, in inches, of the tallest bluebonnet on record, found at Big Bend National Park

**1901**

Year the state Legislature named the bluebonnet the state flower

## FLOWER FODDER:

Because of how the law is written, all six known bluebonnet species in Texas are technically the state flower: *Lupinus sub-carnosus*, *L. texensis*, *L. havardii*, *L. concinnus*, *L. plattensis*, and *L. perennis*.



# The Right Track

Good times past and present in Navasota

By Heather Brand

Set among the East Texas plains and prairies, Navasota bills itself as the gateway to Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site—where Texas settlers declared independence from Mexico—and beckons visitors for springtime bluebonnet vistas. The Union Pacific laid tracks through Navasota in 1902, invigorating the farming community with new businesses and merchants while also attracting drifters on the hunt for an easy dollar. Downtown grew into a bustling district of bars and brothels; shootouts were not uncommon. In 1908, Frank Hamer—the Texas Ranger who later gained fame for tracking down Bonnie and Clyde—became city marshal and restored order. Navasota has come a long way since then. Historical buildings along Railroad Street and Washington Avenue have been refurbished as storefronts that blend contemporary tastes with authentic heritage.



**Houston**  
70 minutes

**Austin**  
2 hours

**San Antonio**  
3 hours

**Dallas**  
3 hours



 **STAY**

 **EAT**

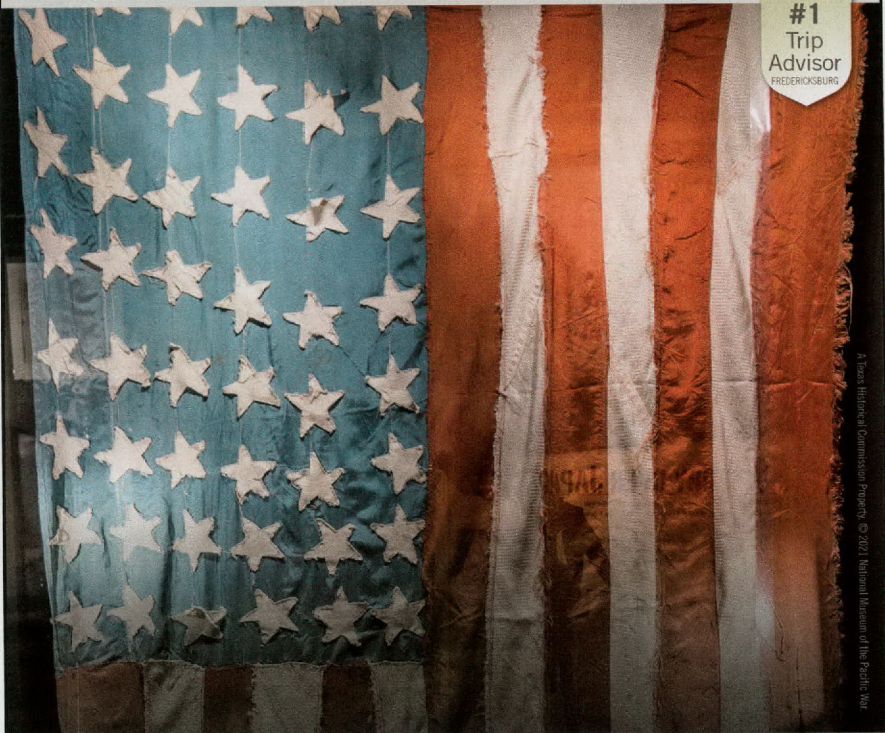
 **SEE**

 **DRINK**

 **SHOP**

# Remembering Unsung Heroes

**RATED  
#1**  
Trip  
Advisor  
FREDERICKSBURG



A Postcard Collection of the Pacific War  
© 2021 National Museum of the Pacific War

## Millions served in WWII in the Pacific. We have preserved thousands of their stories.

In the face of enemy capture, three soldiers were ordered to burn the American flag that flew over a base on Mindanao in 1942.


Before destroying the flag, the men removed the 48 stars and hid them for 3 1/2 years through several prisoners of war camps. When the soldiers received notice of their liberation, they sewed a new flag using a rusty nail, an old sewing machine, parachute material, and stars they had so carefully saved.

The new flag flew over the camp to greet American troops on 7 September 1945.

See this remarkable flag on display at the Museum.

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OF THE  
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311 E Austin Street | Fredericksburg, Texas | [PacificWarMuseum.org](http://PacificWarMuseum.org)



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**1 / MARTIN'S SWEET SHOP**  
Satisfy your sweet tooth at this corner shop named for its New York-born proprietor. Martin Price has been scooping ice cream for more than 50 years, having started with a cart in Brooklyn when he was just 14. Try the cream-sicle soda float or Blue Bell scoops in a cone.

**2 / P.A. SMITH HOTEL** This recently restored hotel, originally built in 1876, features 10 rooms, a penthouse suite, posh furnishings, glittering chandeliers, and a speakeasy. (Rates start at \$289.) The hotel's restaurant, Red Board Tavern and Table, is a few steps away.

**3 / RAIL & RYE** On Friday and Saturday nights, patrons can enjoy the view from the rooftop patio bar, with live music and handcrafted cocktails. Try the Mexican Candy—a tequila concoction sweetened by watermelon and lime. Its downstairs restaurant is due to open this spring.

**4 / MUDDY WATER BOOKSTORE** Readers of all ages will find plenty to choose from at this shop, which stocks both new and used volumes, children's literature, Japanese comics and graphic novels, and books on Texas history. Cozy nooks throughout the store provide spots to browse at leisure.

**5 / CLASSIC ROCK COFFEE COMPANY & KITCHEN** Musical instruments and vintage concert posters adorn the walls of this hip coffee and sandwich shop. A space in the back also has guitars, ukuleles, and vinyl records for sale.

**6 / BLACKBERRY & HONEY-SUCKLE** This specialty store offers a selection of gifts, including scented candles, throw blankets, hand soaps, knitted toys, barware, and edible treats, plus custom-made gift boxes to suit any occasion.

**7 / PATOUT'S WINE SHOPPE** Opened in September, this stylish tasting room serves a selection of reds, whites, rosés, and sparkling wines by the glass or bottle, as well as cold beer and charcuterie offerings, every Wednesday through Saturday evening.

**8 / HORLOCK HOUSE** This Victorian manse is now a contemporary art space showcasing works by artists in residence, such as Coloradoan Saskia Becker and her dreamlike oil paintings. Two new artists join the rotation every six months. **L**





## Built by the Blues

The Texas Legislature declared Navasota the “Blues Capital of Texas” in 2005 in recognition of blues musician and native son Mance Lipscomb (1895-1976).

Tributes to Lipscomb exist around town: Mance Lipscomb Park features a life-size bronze statue of the bluesman playing guitar on a park bench; and the Classic Rock Coffee Company & Kitchen displays concert bills and an electric guitar once owned by the musician, plus a large mural on the side of its building pays tribute to Lipscomb and other musical talents who have made an impact on the region.

Located about 10 miles southeast of downtown Navasota, **7D Ranch Texas** offers cabins and tent and RV camping on its 1,600 scenic acres, where visitors can also participate in trail rides, roping and riding lessons, and other ranch activities. 2729 CR 305. 936-870-5114; 7dranchtexas.com

# FISH

## A MILE IN OUR SHOES

Conroe  
TEXAS

[VISITCONROE.COM](http://VISITCONROE.COM)



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# Wildflower Fields Forever

TEXAS' VARIED LANDSCAPES AND CLIMATES  
YIELD BLOOMS ALL YEAR LONG

By Joe Nick Patoski



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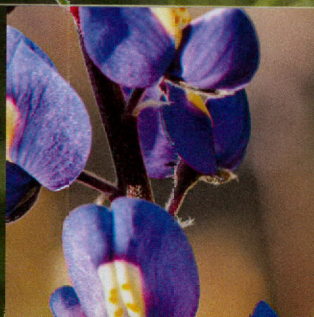
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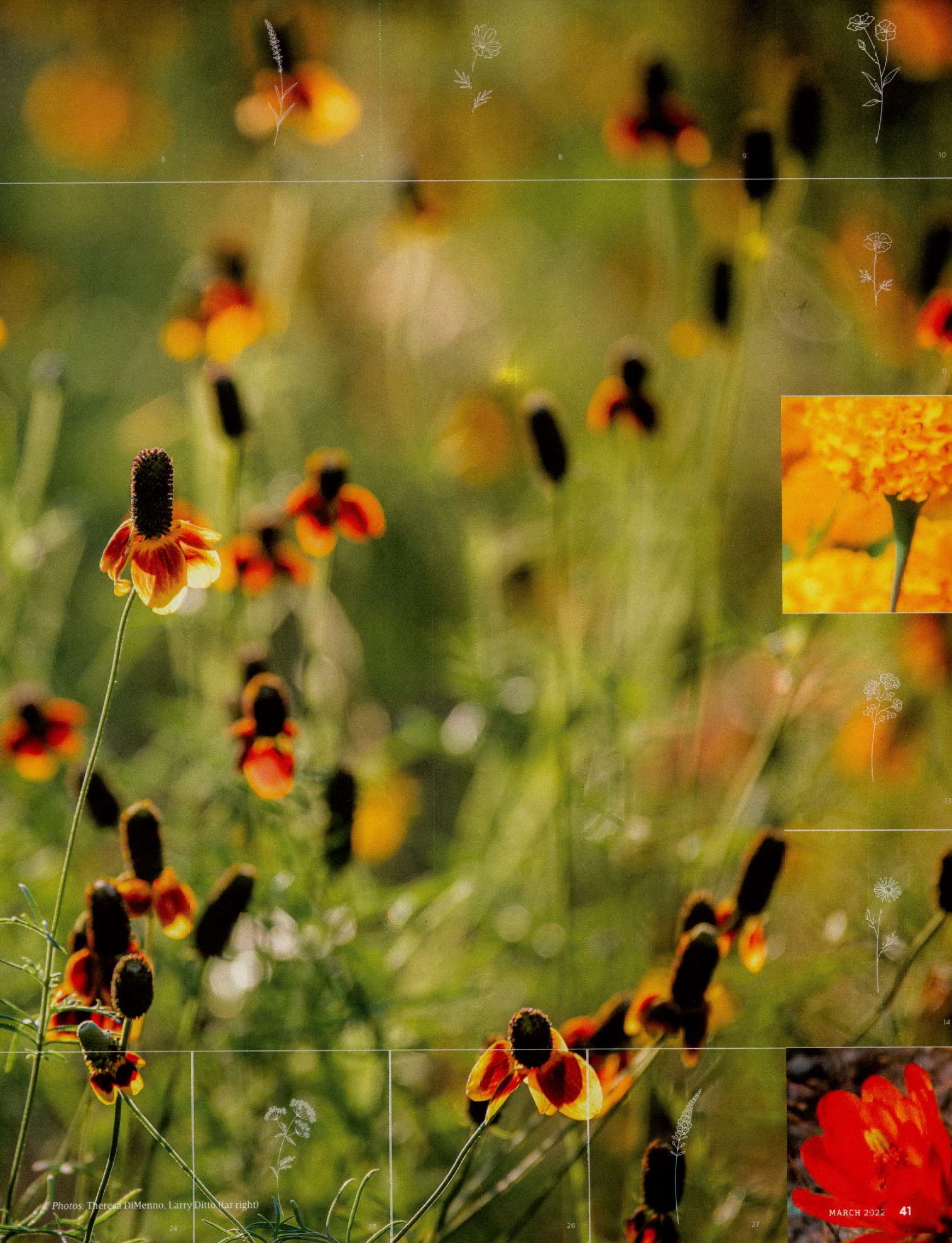
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Photos: Theresa DiMenno, Larry Ditto (far right)

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# M

March may be wildflower month here at *Texas Highways*, but one month is hardly enough to celebrate our opulent blooms. Luckily, wildflowers can be found nearly year-round across the state, provided you know where and when to look. Blooms are already popping in early January in the Rio Grande Valley and the Big Bend, while up in the Panhandle, wildflowers put on their show of colors from April to late fall. In the southern half of the state, wildflowers can bloom year-round.

In the Chihuahuan Desert, wildflowers aren't so much seasonal as opportunistic, waiting for rain to sprout. Mexican tulip poppies typically peak in February, and their only U.S. population blossoms in Mesa de Anguila and the valley between Mesa de Anguila and the Rio Grande in Big Bend National Park.

On the last day of 2021, in an otherwise barren culvert near a paved road west of San Marcos, I spotted a lone four-nerve daisy. In Texas, wildflower season is far more than just a spring thing. The early arrivers, late bloomers, and unsung species may not get the love their better-known cousins do, but each is just as memorable.





HUISACHE



BLUE BONESET

# Winter

Winter is hardly winter along Texas' southern reaches and on the coast. Tropical sage, Anacardita, Turk's-cap lily, primrose, prickly pear, Spanish dagger, and sweet-scented huisache begin blooming in January and February. John Brush, an urban ecologist at the Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center in McAllen, cites a project he started in 2019 using iNaturalist, a crowdsourced species-identification app.

"It is continually being updated with more data points as the community adds more observations," Brush says. "The data is sorted by month, showing what species have been documented, and is ordered by most observations to the fewest observations." The project confirms significant wildflower blooms in the Rio Grande Valley every single month of the year.

In Central Texas, four-nerve daisies—perhaps the only year-round blooms in the region—are both the earliest- and latest-flowering species, says Joe Marcus, a program coordinator at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.

Out west, the typically larger Big Bend bluebonnets pop up in early January, and following wet summers, the spindly ocotillo sprouts its flaming red tips by mid-February.

"My favorite early bloom is the Mexican tulip poppy," says Michael Eason, author of *Wildflowers of Texas*. "It's found in a remote corner of Big Bend National Park and is the only naturally occurring population in the U.S. It's very reminiscent of the Mexican poppy. There will be these big blooms in February, especially close to the river, with tens of thousands of flowers. That canyon turns golden. You can see it on Google Earth."



# Spring

In mid-April, bluebonnets, firewheels, Indian paintbrush, and spider-lilies peak in the central and eastern parts of the state. Iris, violet, orchid, coral-bean, endangered Texas trailing phlox, and carnivorous pitcher plant flower in the densely forested wetlands of the Big Thicket. Up in the Panhandle, wildflower season is just beginning and remains in full force well into June.

Kris Erickson has been documenting wildflowers in photographs for 28 years on the ranch she shares with her husband, John Erickson. “God’s wonders never cease to bring joy and awe to the ones who see,” says Kris, who authored *Panhandle Beauty*. Her favorites: “The rich fuchsia colors of the wine cups and cholla cactus, the delicate white bell-shaped blossoms on the yucca stalks, the sparkling friendliness of the Indian blankets.”

Other Panhandle-High Plains standouts include violet snapdragons, yuccas, royal-blue thistles, black-eyed Susans, sunflowers, beebalms (aka horsemint), prickly pears, and poisonous lockweeds, whose purple blooms are often the first show of color up north.

Of beebalm, Seth Hamby, former head gardener for the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center in Fort Davis, says, “the Chihuahuan Desert has more bee species than anywhere else on Earth.” He cites cowpen daisy, Mexican poppy, chocolate flower, four-nerve daisy, and groundsel among the bee-attracting blooms in the low desert, arroyos, slopes, and sky islands.

April through May is prime time for the Guadalupe Mountains violet in McKittrick Canyon, a feature of Guadalupe Mountains National Park. The rare wildflower is only found within the park.

Around the time spring wildflowers begin to dot the top of Texas, way down south in northwestern Hidalgo County, on Camille Rich’s El Mesteño Ranch and Arboretum, the *Manfreda maculosa*—a cactus-like succulent—shows off its cream-colored tubular flowers. The latter provides sustenance to a globally endangered butterfly named the Manfreda Giant-Skipper



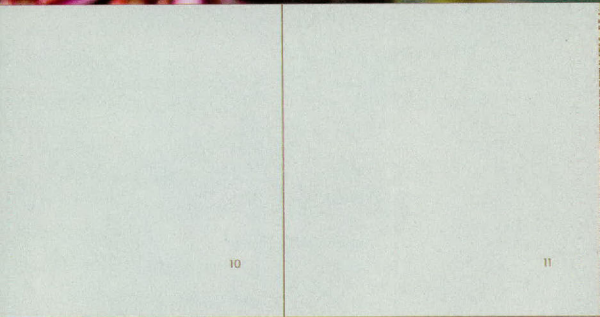
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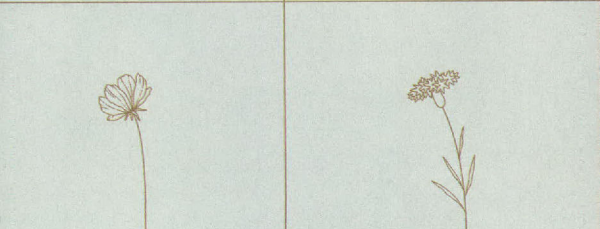


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Photos: Theresa DiMennto, Larry Ditto (bottom left)

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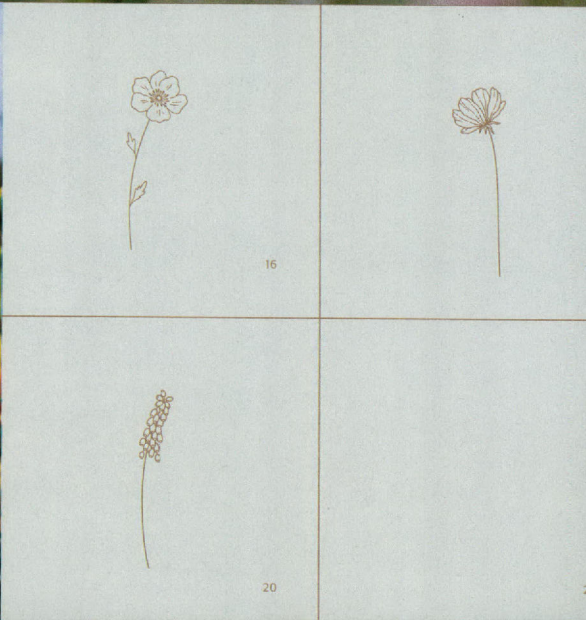


WOOLLY LOCOWEED











GAYFEATHER

# Summer

Found almost everywhere in Texas, yellow composites—commonly called DYCs—don't start their big show until May. Many are still in bloom when summer solstice rolls around provided sufficient rain has fallen.

Prickly pear, gayfeather, beebalm, and cardinal flower all bloom in the Texas summer heat. Mountain pinks provide a surprising contrast to the browning landscape along the rocky roadsides of Central and West Texas. The long-stemmed Brazos rain lily typically appears a couple days after precipitation throughout the summer and sometimes into October, then usually disappears a couple days later.

Summer at Guadalupe Mountains National Park means continual wildflower blooms—if spring and summer rains come, park biologist Mike Medrano says. “Some of the vegetation around GMNP is opportunistic. The season doesn't matter. It's going to bloom when there's water,” he explains. “I've seen ocotillo in full bloom in December. There was stuff blooming last September, like species of asters, because of the summer monsoon rain that I'd never seen before.”

Medrano notes McKittrick Canyon and the Bowl Trail are particularly good spots to view wildflowers. “But there are also a number of gypsum-loving plant species found on the gypsum dunes of the Salt Basin on the west side of the park that are not generally found elsewhere in Texas,” he says.

Park staff is currently cooperating with researchers who are studying the little-known Guadalupe Mountains violet, whose late spring-early summer blooms are unique to the national park.



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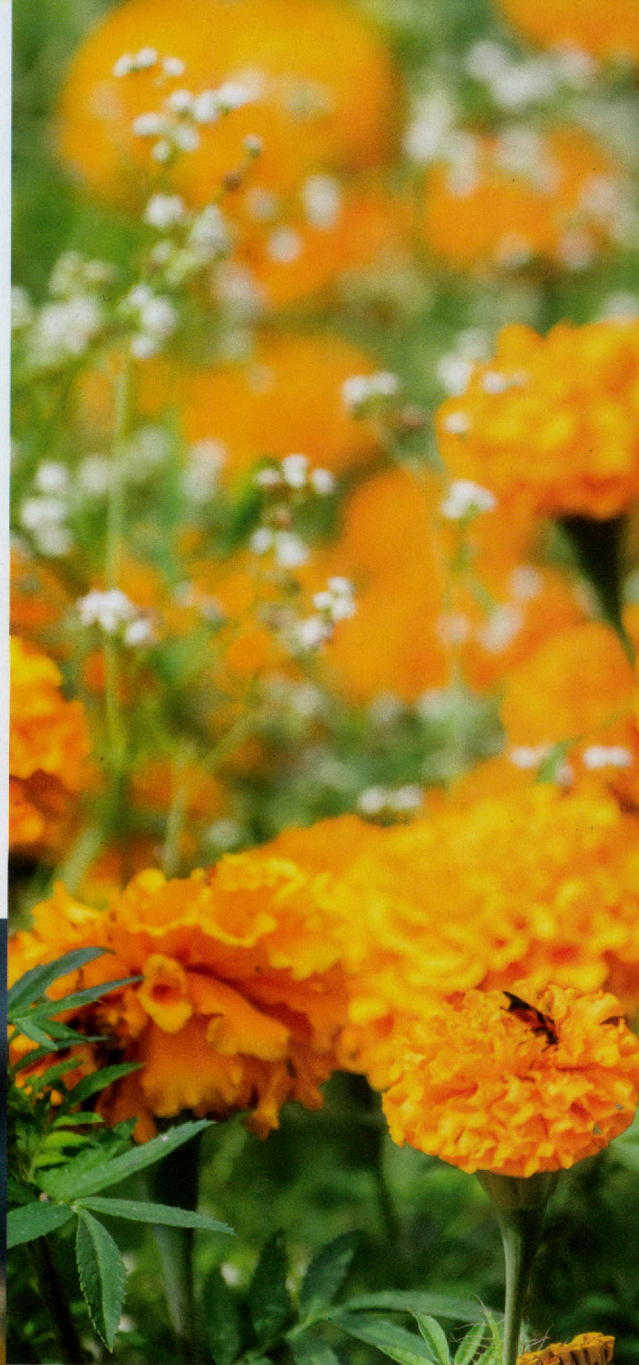
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# Fall

Maxmilian sunflowers signal the end of summer and beginning of fall across much of Texas. Fall is also the season for Leavenworth's eryngo—conically-clustered tiny flowers with blue anthers that bloom from the Trans-Pecos region to North Central Texas. The purple-hued plant is frequently showcased in gardens at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

Found statewide, various species of false foxglove start showing in mid-summer and peak in autumn. Different varieties of autumnal marigolds are similar summer-fall bloomers in the eastern half of the state, while Siam weed and wild leadwort make year-end appearances in the Rio Grande Valley.

Four years ago, on a brisk November day within eyeshot of the San Jacinto Monument east of Houston, I observed a bluebonnet in full bloom. Last year, lantana turned on its psychedelic easel of tiny colorful flowers during an unseasonably warm December in the Hill Country, while out west the Big Bend bluebonnets were doing their thing early. Down south, phlox and Turk's-cap were popping. Eyes wide open, I could clearly see that every month is wildflower month in Texas. 🌻



LANTANA



MAXIMILIAN SUNFLOWER



MARIGOLD



Photo: Theresa DiMenno

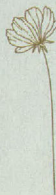


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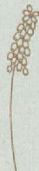


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THE

ARTISTS WORK THEIR  
MAGIC ON THE FLORAL  
WONDERS OF TEXAS

ART



OF

SPRING

BY CLAYTON MAXWELL

OLEANDERS.  
BY KITTY DUDICS

# G

Good artists entertain. Great artists show us what we're missing. They crack open our perspectives to reveal the details, angles, and colors we hadn't noticed before. One could spend their whole life in Texas, for example, and never spot the false dayflower, which thrives in wooded and shady areas in Central Texas. But seen through the eyes of Austin photographer Chris Carson, the false dayflower's translucent lavender petals gaze back alertly, almost human.

Through photography, painting, collage, textiles, and sculpture, artists from across the state reveal floral wonders we might otherwise miss. And when we see these treasures with fresh eyes, the natural response is joy.

Consider Austinite Elizabeth Chapin's outrageous mega magnolia sconces. Many of us have admired the magnolia tree bloom's soft white petals and sweet perfume. But Chapin's in-your-face versions—with their velvet pink stamens and beaded cone tucked inside a nest of petals—make a bold statement. Crafted of acrylic paint on canvas, fabric, thread, beads, and metal, the sconces light up the room, literally.

Painter Kitty Dudics conveys her delight in Texas flowers through colorful paintings awash in patterns. Raised amid the bougainvillea, hibiscus, and oleander common in the Rio Grande Valley, Dudics knows intimately the stages in which the grapefruit and pomegranate trees in her backyard transform from flower to fruit, and how they are now fighting back from last year's devastating freeze. Her act of paying attention is born of a deep love of the land she grew up on.

Painter Mia Carameros' flower-inspired works bow to the vegetative wonder around her, including the weeds. She elevates the humblest of plants, like a vine growing out of a sidewalk, into a deep black gouache composition that highlights the vine's intricacies and elegance. Carameros doesn't take all the credit, though. "There is a creator of



these things, and it's not me," says Carameros, who grew up in El Paso and now lives in Austin. "It's much bigger than me, and that feels really purposeful and meaningful. Just talking about it makes me want to go paint."

The delight found in flowers feels uplifting but not frivolous. It is as resilient as Dudics' grapefruit tree fighting back after last year's freeze, as playfully sensual as the velvet pink stamens of Chapin's magnolia, and as surprising as the gaze of Carson's false dayflower. As Chapin reminds us: "Sometimes there is nothing more shocking than joy."





# KITTY DUDICS

LILY OF THE NILE  
OIL PAINTING

**KITTY DUDICS GREW** up near Brownsville in the 1950s and '60s on a *resaca*, an oxbow lake formed by an ancient distributary of the Rio Grande. As a girl, she would wade deep in the

*resaca's* mud, trying to dig out fresh clams. Once she found a pearl. Her mother was a painter and grew hibiscus everywhere. Painting, as well as an abundance of flowers—*bougainvillea*, *oleanders*,

and *hibiscus*—surrounded her.

In childhood, Dudics forged a relationship with nature that continues to fuel her as she paints in her Corpus Christi studio, which she named *Girasol*—Spanish for sunflower—because of the way the flower's face turns to follow the path of the sun. "Because that's what I do when I go out to my studio to paint," Dudics says. "It's my place to turn to God."

A mother of three who taught painting at Del Mar College in Corpus for 34 years, Dudics is a watchful observer of the many flowers of Texas. She admires the azaleas in Tyler, the unfolding of *gladiolus* grown in North Texas, "the lavender pom-pom shape of the *agapanthus*" in South Texas, and the pomegranate that blooms in her backyard in Corpus.

She's also painted the lavender fields that blossom in early June in Blanco. "My family indulged me," she says. "They let me watercolor on-site, which is my favorite thing to do. I didn't have to go to southern France to find lavender. It was right there in Blanco."

[kittydudicspainter.com](http://kittydudicspainter.com)



# CHRIS CARSON

FALSE DAYFLOWER  
PHOTOGRAPH

**THE CURVE OF A THISTLE'S** green stem. The rough edges of a thorny white prickly poppy. The cascading purple buds of a wisteria flower. These are the subtleties of everyday flowers captured in Austin photographer Chris Carson's series "Botanicals." Inspired by classical botanical illustrations, Carson's photographs strip away context so we see a flower distilled to its purest form.

Among Carson's subjects is the false dayflower, a

common Texas wildflower that hides in woodlands and alleys where it's not often noticed. His photographs of the flower, isolated, show off its fragile overlapping violet blue petals. Its tiny stamens gaze at the camera, making it feel more fauna than flora. Not just a photo of a flower, it's an arresting portrait.

"People walk by and don't notice flowers like these," Carson says. "And I think, 'It's so incredibly beautiful. If it was only isolated, I could prove it to you.'"

Carson doesn't use Photoshop or other digital enhancement. Instead, with twine and clamps, he pulls back the extraneous foliage that naturally obscures flowers. But he doesn't pick them. "No flowers were harmed in the making of these photographs," he says. Working in parks or backyards, he photographs the flowers against an off-white backdrop.

Carson was a sports and news photographer who found his way to flowers when he became a dad. "All of a sudden, having a 1- and a 2-year-old, I was stopping every five seconds with them to look at ants and flowers," he says. "I started learning about plants to tell my kids about them. My life went from that of a busy freelancer to really slowing down, and it took me stopping and slowing down to start seeing these things around me." [chriscarson.com](http://chriscarson.com)

WATCHING MY GARDEN  
GROW ALL BY MYSELF  
OIL PAINTING

# BRADLEY KERL





POST VET  
OIL PAINTING

**WHILE MOST PEOPLE GET EXCITED** about Texas bluebonnets, Bradley Kerl says he was always “an Indian paintbrush guy.” Raised in Beaumont, the Houston painter remembers begging his mom to pull over on highway trips because he wanted to see what color the flowers really were.

“Depending upon the variety and the season, they can be fluorescent orange or almost pink,” he says. “From a distance you can approximate their actual color, but getting up close is something different.”

Kerl’s massive oil paintings, some more than 7 feet tall, offer that up-close view. *Post Vet* began as a bundle of flowers that Kerl saw at the entrance to a grocery store he popped into after a visit to the veterinarian. Sensing the elements of a painting, he snapped a photo for reference.

Kerl’s paintings go deep into his flower subjects, studying the “interesting moments” of color, light, and shadow bouncing around. One pale pink rose in his painting *Watching My Garden Grow All By Myself*, for example, has approximately 12 different shades of pink in its petals. “It takes a lot of concentration and energy, but I think that’s where good things happen,” he says. “It’s why I love doing it.” [bradleykerl.com](http://bradleykerl.com)



**THE GENESIS OF** Elizabeth Chapin's unruly, jumbo-size flower sconces goes back to the Annunciation. "If you look at Annunciation art throughout history," Chapin explains, "Gabriel is frequently holding a lily. The lily is an offering. I've always loved the image, particularly Mary's hands." Chapin's twist on the theme is a series of

# ELIZABETH CHAPIN

MAGNOLIA SCENCE  
MIXED MEDIA

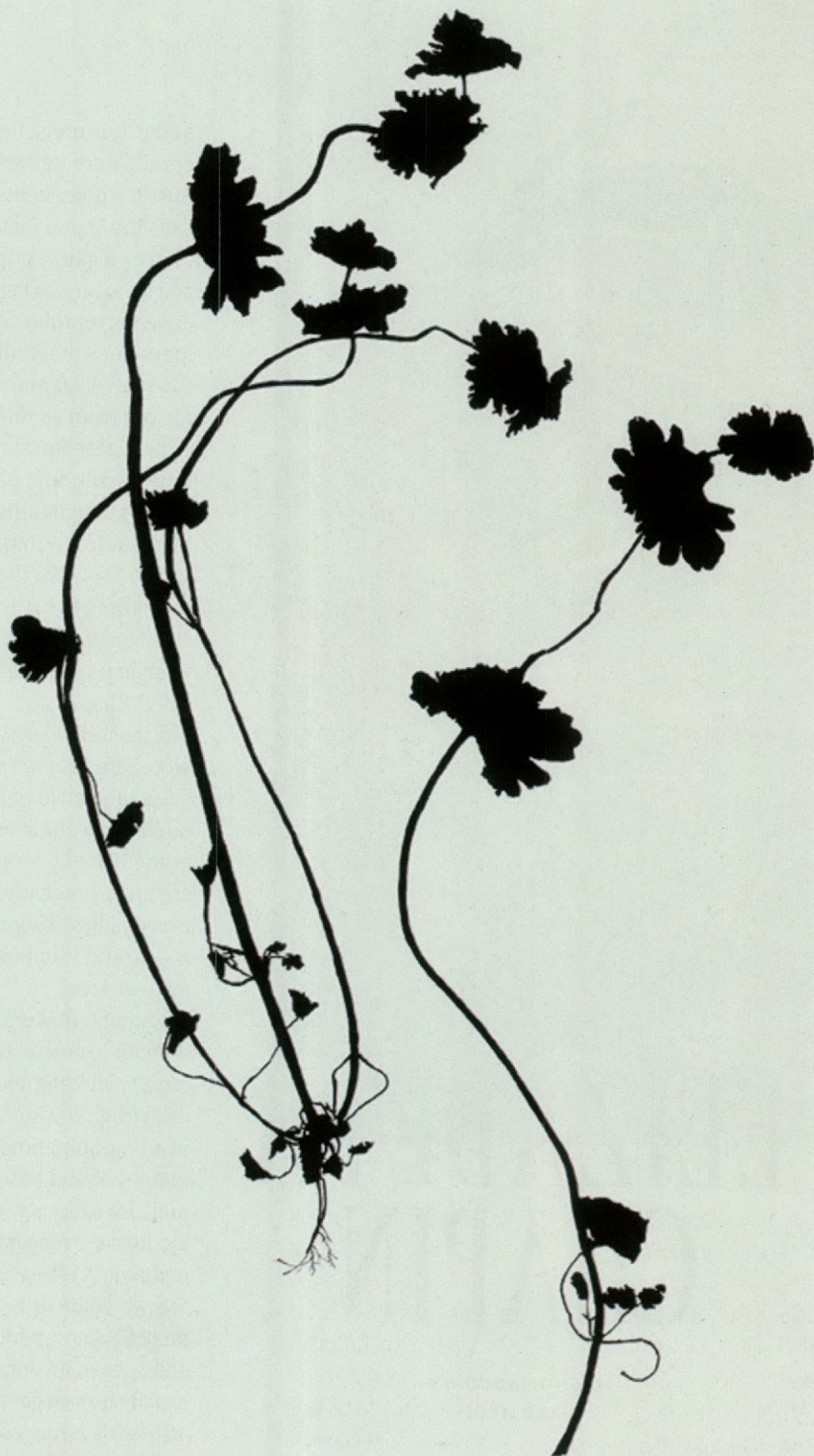
audacious mega flowers she's created in her Austin studio, which she calls the "petal factory." There's a gauzy poppy, a luscious iris, a jagged-edge parrot tulip, and a marvelous magnolia with rose velvet stamens poking out from its interior cone. These floral mash-ups of sculpture, painting, textiles, and lighting lean out from Chapin's studio wall, like they have something to say.

"If you look at what women painted historically," Chapin says, "then, yes, it was flowers. They were safe. Women weren't even allowed to paint from nudes until about as late as the 1930s. ... My flowers are huge, unwieldy, like everything's become too much. And I suppose that's the way I feel."

Chapin's flowers are difficult to create. They require welding, electrical wiring, sewing, and beading. Sometimes things fail. Her parrot tulip, for example, proved top heavy so she had to rewire it. "I like working this way," she says. "It's a puzzle. I know where I'm going, even if I don't know exactly how to get there." [elizabethchapin.com](http://elizabethchapin.com)

# MIA CARAMEROS

SIDEWALK WITH MABEL  
GOUACHE ON PAPER



**AS A CHILD GROWING** up in El Paso, artist Mia Carameros would flatten pansies from the garden, dab them in glitter glue, and put them in the freezer. “Because it’s a desert, I didn’t see flowers so often,” she says, “but I do have a distinct memory of being so captured by this little iris in our yard that sort of sprung up out of nowhere.”

Today, Carameros is still captivated by things that seemingly spring up out of nowhere, like cracks in asphalt. *Sidewalk with Mabel*, her gouache painting using opaque watercolors, depicts wild plants she noticed while on a walk.

“They were really delicate and feminine, but they’re weeds,” she says. “A lot of my work celebrates the mundane moments because I think that’s life. It’s all these small moments that, at the end of the day, show us what our life is about, you know, and what did I choose to do with it?” [miacarameros.com](http://miacarameros.com)



# SUSIE PHILLIPS

TWO SINGING BIRDS  
EMBROIDERY

**DALLAS-BASED MULTI-MEDIA** artist Susie Phillips understands the allure of a magnolia. Skilled with a needle and thread, she also knows the satisfaction of stitching flowers into fabric. When she recently unearthed the sketch for one of her large

pastels of a vase of pink magnolias she'd drawn many years before, she decided to resurrect it through embroidery, and the needlework *Pink Magnolia Stitch* resulted.

"It's easy to keep coming back to flowers because there's always

some variation on what you can be doing," she says. "I do magnolias a lot because I love the way their blossoms overlap and fold on one another. They're just luscious. I'm always drawn to the lushness of things." [susiephillipsart.com](http://susiephillipsart.com)

TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER





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# DEEP LIKE THE RIVER

BY ROBERTO JOSÉ  
ANDRADE FRANCO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
CHRIST CHÁVEZ

AN ELEGY  
FOR A COUSIN  
ALONG THE  
RIO GRANDE



THE AUTHOR (RIGHT) AND HIS COUSIN (BACK)

# I DIDN'T PLAN TO WRITE ABOUT MY COUSIN.

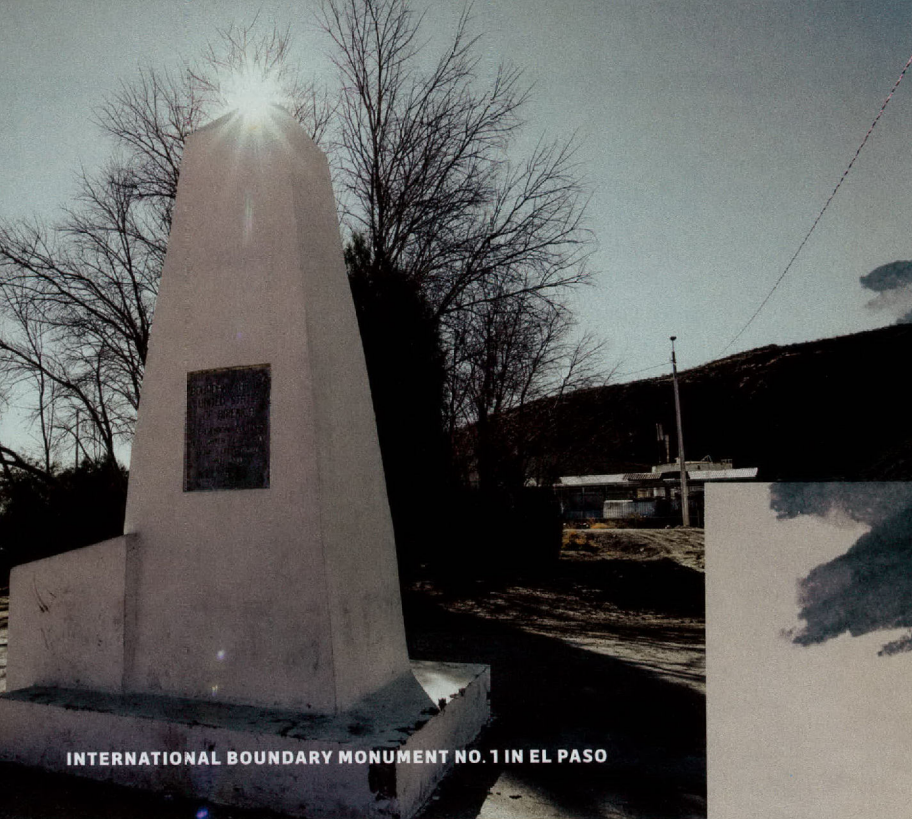
I wanted to write about the history, culture, people, and places I saw while driving the entire Texas-Mexico border, as close to the Rio Grande as I could get. I'd been wanting to take that drive for the last few years, right around the time I felt my life starting to change. I figured if I could somehow understand these places that are culturally similar to where I'm from in El Paso, I'd understand myself better. Like I'd taste some food, hear an instrument, or read about a folk hero—all shaped by the Rio Grande—and discover something that'd help me make sense of the shifts in my own life. How I'd gone from working construction for a decade to making my living as a writer.

I drove a rented Jeep Compass and started at the International Boundary Monument No. 1 in El Paso, a 167-year-old, 12-foot-tall obelisk near the invisible lines separating Texas, Mexico, and New Mexico. It's the first of 276 obelisks between the western edge of Texas and the Pacific Ocean. Located on isolated areas atop mountains, as well as in the middle of cities, these monuments help mark the United States-Mexico border. To the east, since the Rio Grande naturally

serves as the dividing line between the two countries, no such monuments are necessary.

I left on a Wednesday in early October, hours before the sunrise painted the desert a light orange. Toward the beginning of the trip, on US 90 in Marfa, I stopped to look at murals depicting *Giant*, the 1956 movie about a Texas cattle rancher. Country music powered by solar panels emanated from nearby speakers disguised as rocks. On US 67





INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY MONUMENT NO. 1 IN EL PASO

around Shafter, on the Cuesta del Burro range of the Chinati Mountains, I stared at a formation shaped like Abraham Lincoln's face staring at the heavens. Near the end of the trip, in downtown Mission, I stopped at the mural dedicated to Tom Landry, the legendary Dallas Cowboys coach who was born and raised there. And on Boca Chica Beach, at the end of my trip, I saw the rockets Elon Musk moved to Texas to shoot off.

It took five days to traverse almost 2,000 miles. The round trip from El Paso past Brownsville and back, from desert to water to desert, took almost 40 hours. I kept changing highways to stay close to the border. Throughout it all, because it's what I sometimes do during long stretches of silence, I thought about my cousin. About how, in the late 1990s and early 2000s we'd often drive back home to El Paso from Phoenix, Arizona, a six-hour trip that felt like nothing compared to this one. Since we always left after a day of working construction, we'd sit in the dark for part of the drive. My Chevy S-10 pickup's dashboard lights shining a faint glow on our faces.

Sometimes we'd sit in silence. Other times, we'd talk about what we wanted to do with our lives.

**A WEEK BEFORE THANKSGIVING 2020**, my cousin died at 49 years old. A few days before then, he was admitted to the hospital for COVID-19. "You guys were once close," my wife said after my mother called to tell me of his hospitalization in El Paso. "You should call him." My mother said the same.

My cousin was once like my older brother. Together, in

BECAUSE  
IT'S WHAT I  
SOMETIMES DO  
DURING LONG  
STRETCHES  
OF SILENCE,  
I THOUGHT  
ABOUT MY  
COUSIN.



GIANT MOVIE MURALS IN MARFA

**OLD SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD DEPOT IN MARATHON**



June 1998, we left El Paso for Phoenix, where we lived and worked together for a few years. I was 17. He was 26. I had just graduated from high school and knew nothing. I had nothing. The first weeks living on our own, we slept on the floor, next to each other, sharing a comforter.

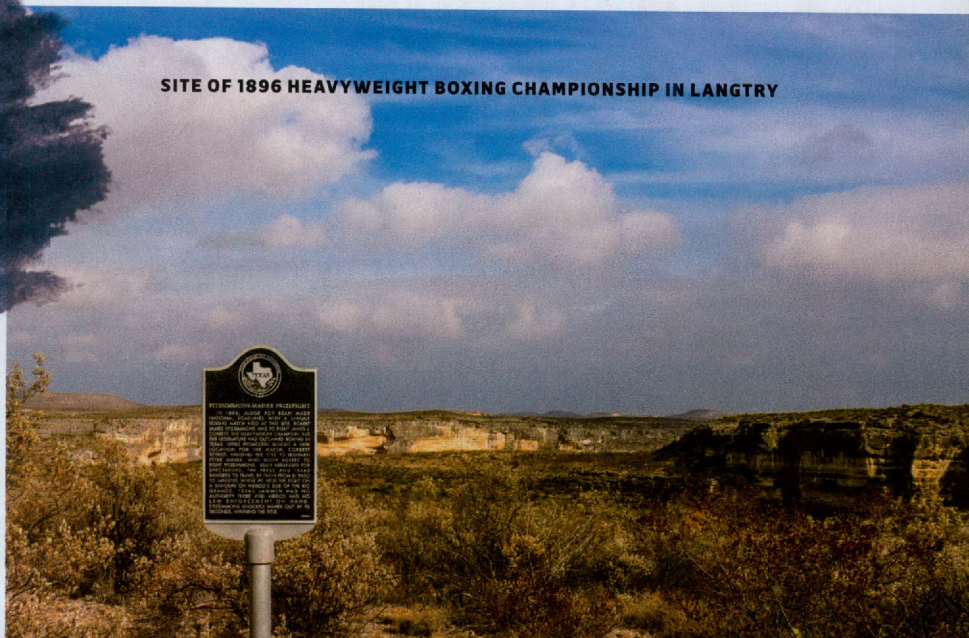
We never had a falling out. No big fight, no tragic reason for seeing less of each other. After more than a decade of living together in Phoenix, we moved apart from one other, and we both got married. I became a father. That's enough to alter life.

We went from spending every day together working for the same construction company to only seeing each other on a handful of holidays each year. On those rare days, we'd talk and laugh about things from long ago, like how on Friday afternoons—since we didn't know how to manage our money—we'd give a payday loan shop a percentage to cash our checks. Then, sometimes with salt rings on our shirts down to our chests from sweating on the job, we ate like kings at restaurants where patrons wondered what we were doing there. On Sunday nights, we braced ourselves for another week of eating like paupers. Unless we found copper on a construction site. Whatever money the recycling center gave us for it helped us make it to Friday.

We enjoyed reminiscing. My cousin was then working at an El Paso psychiatric center—where he'd tried to get me a job—and always asked what I was doing whenever we saw each other. Just working, I'd tell him, without offering specifics. I felt embarrassed, or maybe even afraid, to tell him I was trying to write for a living. Writing was something I started doing while we lived together. Back then, while scribbling thoughts on a pocket notepad during the middle of the workday, I never imagined I'd get paid to do this.

THERE'S  
SOMETHING  
PEACEFUL  
ABOUT  
DRIVING  
DURING  
THE HOURS  
BEFORE THE  
SUN RISES  
OVER TEXAS.

**SITE OF 1896 HEAVYWEIGHT BOXING CHAMPIONSHIP IN LANGTRY**





During those holiday talks, I'd always think, I should call him more often. For a variety of reasons—none of which seem good enough now—I never did.

I took my wife and mother's advice and called him at the hospital. It went straight to voicemail. "Humberto, es Tohuí. Nada mas quería ver como seguías," I said. *Just wanted to see how you were.* He always called me Tohuí—after a panda born in 1981 at the Chapultepec Zoo in Mexico City—and because he did, everyone else called me that. And because everyone called me that, while living in Phoenix, I got the nickname tattooed on my inner left forearm.

I called the next day. Straight to voicemail again. Because I'd just say the same thing, I didn't leave a message. I figured he'd be fine. That just like every other family member of mine who contracted COVID-19, except for an uncle, he'd recover. I was certain I'd see him again. And the next time I'd see him, we'd talk and laugh about things from long ago.

**THERE'S SOMETHING PEACEFUL** about driving during the hours before the sun rises over Texas. Whether it's in the desert, about an hour east of El Paso before you reach the Border Patrol checkpoint; or outside Del Rio on the way to Quemado, where the nights are as dark as any I've seen.

Drive Texas roads long enough, and they'll alter your perception of time. Hearing someone from another part of the country complain that four hours is a long drive, I think, that's only the amount of time it takes to go from El Paso to Presidio.

Growing up in El Paso, Presidio was the only other part of Texas I knew. For a few weeks in 2004, a couple of years after moving back from Phoenix, I lived in Presidio in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house with eight other men. All of us were there to work on highway construction for an El Paso-based company.

The job was to replace old road signs with shiny new ones during the blazing hot summer months. With a 60-pound jackhammer that vibrated so intensely it left your hands and forearms aching, we'd break the old signs from the ground. A few feet from there, we'd dig a 30-inch hole, mix cement, then place a new sign that noted the speed limit or warned of upcoming curves. Sometimes, while working so dangerously close to moving cars that I could feel a gust of wind whenever they sped by, I wondered about the places people were driving to or from. Other times, I'd get startled by the sounds of asphalt tearing through tires as drivers tried to brake hard. I despised that job. Still, at times, I miss those days, and I'm not sure why.



SPACEX IN BOCA CHICA

I'll see workers on the side of the road, doing the same job, and feel both relief and guilt. Relieved I'm no longer doing that. Guilty because it sometimes feels like a fluke that my goals and dreams have begun to come true. I swear it was just yesterday that my cousin and I were trying to find our ways out of working construction. Trying to figure out how to pay rent and eat something during the week besides the cheapest brand of ramen noodles. Trying to stay hopeful that one day we'd look back at these days with humor.

I can feel my life changing. Privileged enough to make my living writing and use it as a form of therapy, and finally have enough time to drive the Texas-Mexico border. Enough time to think and remember. I remember when my cousin got a job that wasn't in construction, with a company that paid well and offered benefits—we thought he'd made it.

We'd celebrated that night by eating at a restaurant in Phoenix that was too expensive for what we made.

**I'VE TAKEN THE RIO GRANDE FOR GRANTED:** Texas' birthmark had always been there, and I just didn't notice. I didn't realize until I was an adult that just because the El Paso section of the river often amounted to scattered puddles on a concrete border, it wasn't the same everywhere else. That it becomes majestically picturesque around Big Bend where it slices through limestone canyons. That by the time you get to the Rio Grande Valley, the river curls and turns in what seems like every direction. Maybe because I crossed it so often—either in a car or by foot, to get to

school or to visit family—I never understood the river had once inspired grand plans for navigation back when Richard King of King Ranch used it to transport goods via his steamboat. And that on the other side of Texas, where the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf of Mexico, water flowed and inspired poems.

"All my pain and all my trouble / In your bosom let me hide," folklorist Américo Paredes wrote in his poem *The Rio Grande* from his collection, *Between Two Worlds*. "Drain my soul of all its sorrow / As you drain the countryside." One of Texas' great writers, Paredes was 45 when he decided to publish his book of poetry even though he'd been writing it for 30 years. Perhaps he felt embarrassed, or maybe even afraid, to let people see the way his part of Texas inspired him. He was from Brownsville, not far from where my journey ended.

"No contestó," I told my mother. *He didn't answer.* "Le dejé un mensaje." *I left a message.*

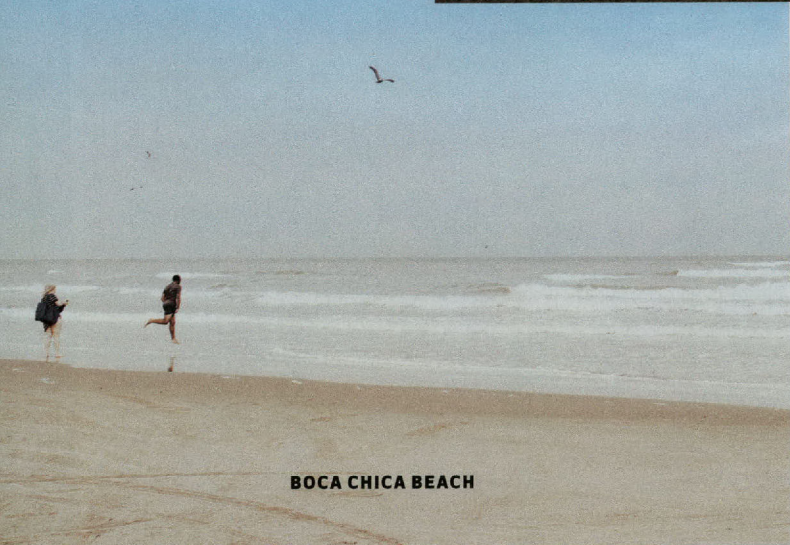
A week before Thanksgiving, my mother told me my cousin had been intubated. Despite the setback, we told each other that didn't mean he wouldn't recover. He'll be all right, we said. A few hours later, my cousin died alone, surrounded by unfamiliar faces.

My mother cried when she told me. Because she'd always been the calming voice, it felt surreal. A few months before, when my 56-year-old uncle died—also of COVID-19 according to his doctors in Juárez, also surrounded by unfamiliar faces—her untroubled tone said at least he was no longer suffering from battling his own demons. Her voice



TOM LANDRY MURAL IN MISSION

I'VE TAKEN  
THE RIO  
GRANDE FOR  
GRANTED:  
TEXAS'  
BIRTHMARK  
HAD ALWAYS  
BEEN THERE,  
AND I JUST  
DIDN'T NOTICE.



BOCA CHICA BEACH

Thanksgiving. As doves fly, his wake was about a mile from the Rio Grande. The same river we grew up crossing countless times from El Paso to Juárez and back. The same river I planned to write about but instead drove along while I thought about him.

I suppose that's one of those curves not even a highway sign can warn you about. I never imagined I wouldn't see him again. Just like, when I was 17 and knew nothing, I never realized relationships don't have to be destroyed for them to fall apart. That it takes effort to keep families and traditions alive.

When my drive began, I'd imagined arriving at Boca Chica Beach and walking barefoot into the water. My cousin and I had once planned to visit San Diego and do the same. But when I got to Boca Chica Beach, all the construction, the semitrucks clogging the two-lane road, felt unnatural. The metallic rockets built by Musk's SpaceX had ravaged the beach's beauty. Even the name for the place, Starbase, seemed unreal. Not wanting the journey's end to feel anti-climactic, I drove in the opposite direction to South Padre Island. There, I took my shoes off and walked into the Gulf of Mexico's warm waters, where the Rio Grande disappears.

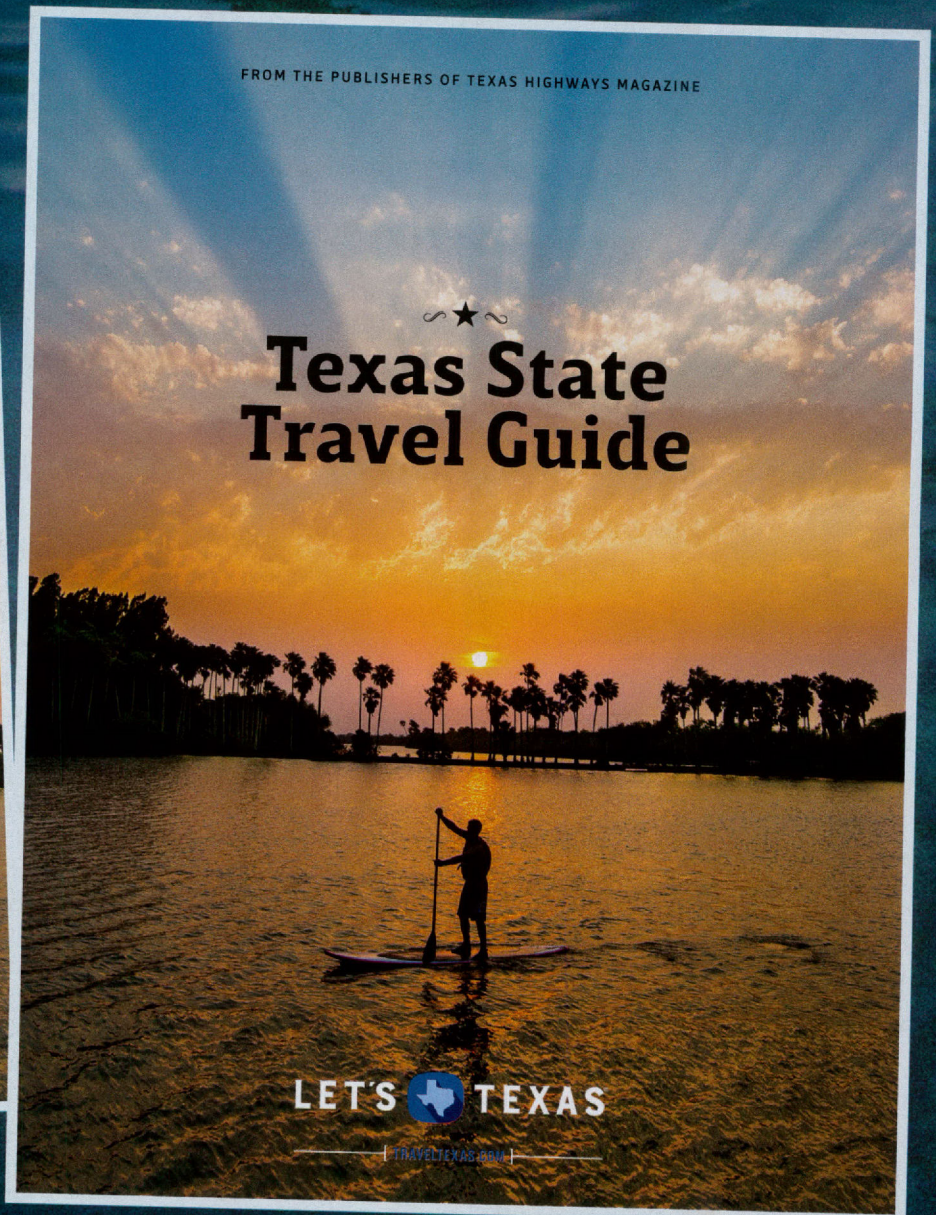
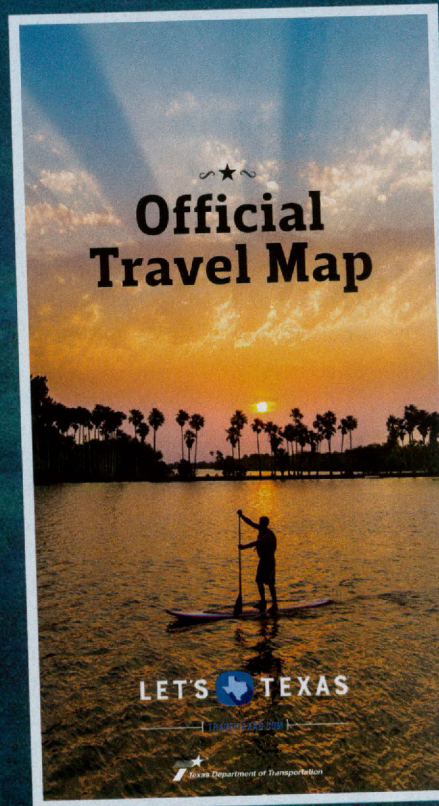
Humberto Rosales was among the 53 names listed in the obituaries of the *El Paso Times* on Dec. 1, 2020. That was my cousin. He was 49 years old. He had a loud, goofy laugh. We used to talk and laugh about things from long ago. 🐼

was serene then. But this time it was different.

Even when she wasn't crying, she sounded somber. The way all our voices did. The way my aunt sounded when I called to tell her I was sorry. The way my cousins—his three brothers—all sounded when I called to tell them the same. The way I assume I sounded as I tried, but couldn't say, how sorry I was we'd all grown apart. So far apart that, at the end, I had to make a few calls to get each of their numbers.

We buried my cousin in El Paso on the Thursday after

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# PLATES



**PÍCATE MUCHO**  
in Laredo puts an  
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Mexican *chilitos*.



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customer favorites.

# Sweet, Sour, and Oh So Spicy

Tejano millennials are gushing over Pícate Mucho's newfangled *chilitos*

By Luis G. Rendon

Tucked inside Laredo's rancho-inspired hangout Golondrina Food Park, Pícate Mucho's taste-bud-melting shop is raising the bar for Tex-Mex candies and snacks known as *chilitos*. Catharine Cortez, the owner of Pícate Mucho, or "get spicy," has guided her operation from a part-time, online-only home business to a full-time brick-and-mortar enterprise in 19 months—all during the pandemic. Harried but undaunted, she watches as a line of customers in front of her stall grows in anticipation of creations that blend the old school with a millennial Mexican American twist.

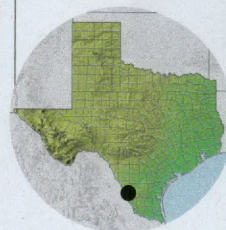
One Thursday night, a customer orders 10 8-ounce tubs of peach rings, gushers, and Sour Patch Kids coated in *chamoy*—a Mexican condiment made from pickled fruits and spiced with chiles—and dusted with Cortez's signature chilito powder. (Chilito is interchangeable for the treat and the chile powder.) The customer's having trouble taking her towering haul back to her car. "Mom, can you help?" Cortez, a Laredo native, calls out to Michelle Garza, who is enjoying dinner and catching up with family nearby but dutifully aids in wrangling the order.

"I told you my mom wasn't helping me anymore, and of course, here she is, helping me again," Cortez says.

In April 2020, Cortez was homebound on maternity leave from her job as a

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**“We had hundreds of cars coming by every day, and our house looked like a candy store.”**

legal assistant right as the pandemic hit South Texas. Bored and swiping through TikTok and Instagram, she noticed a trend of young Latinos making their own chilito powders and chamoy. Folks were combining them to make their favorite classic snacks doused in the spicy stuff, like chips, fruit, and snow cones known as *raspas*. But Cortez was more intrigued by the combinations she hadn't seen before—classic American candies like gummy bears drowning in chamoy and chilito. Cortez, like so many other Tejanos, grew up with traditional Mexican chilitos. “I'd literally beg my mom, eating them until I'd make myself sick,” she says.

She saw the opportunity to create her own version of the sweet, sour, and spicy staple. Blending her own Mexican spices and sauces with American candies seemed an antidote to her isolation. Inspired, she ran to the corner store, grabbed some chile powder, chamoy, and gummies, and started experimenting. That's when her water broke.

“It's like I gave birth to two babies that day,” she says, laughing. While she recovered from an emergency C-section, she plotted her next steps. “I told my husband, ‘OK, go get me more stuff.’” She kept tweaking her recipe, testing blends on friends and family for weeks until she was satisfied. Cortez says she experimented with 20-odd ingredients, and six made the cut. “We have customers who ask us what's in it, but I'm like, ‘Well, I can't say!’”

During the pandemic, Tejano millennials have flocked to the internet to show off their chilito mashups. And brands like Chilito Loco in the Rio Grande Valley and Enchilositos Treats in Brenham have found success online. But only Pícate Mucho has

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**CATHARINE CORTEZ** began making chilito while on maternity leave; Other offerings include berry straws and peachy rings.

made the jump from virtual to in person. “Anyone can make chilito,” Cortez says, “but our taste is what sets us apart.”

Open Wednesday through Sunday, Cortez and her sisters, Anali and Ale Garza, spend Monday and Tuesday making their various blends—dry rubs for watermelon bits, wet paste for gummy bears, and a liquid condiment for squirting on top of snacks. “I don’t know what she puts in them, but they’re the best chilito candies I’ve tried,” says local beauty queen and chilito fiend Chelsea Morgensen, whose championing of Pícate Mucho on social media has added to its word-of-mouth appeal.

Michelle, who has been working in a dental office for 25 years, initially had a tough time seeing her daughter’s vision. “When she told me she wanted to sell

chilito candies,” Michelle says, “I thought, ‘Who’d want to buy this stuff?’” Nevertheless, she helped run the business while Cortez juggled her return to her day job. When it became clear the side hustle was outgrowing its confines in Cortez’s home, she knew her career needed to change. “It was too much,” she says. “We had hundreds of cars coming by every day, and our house looked like a candy store.”

Cortez quit her job in June and in September of 2021 opened shop at Golondrina Park. She was an instant hit, selling out in two days. Michelle now laughs: “The joke is on me, I guess.”

Since moving to a physical location, Cortez has expanded Pícate Mucho’s menu, pushing the creative limits of chilito with freshly prepared snacks. Think strawberries stuffed with pickles,



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wrapped in Fruit Roll-Ups, and doused in chamoy (“Strawberry Bombs”). Or corn chips tossed with Japanese peanuts, cucumber slices, jicama, corn nuts, and chamoy (“Tostitos Locos”).


But the bestselling item remains the chilito gusher, a Betty Crocker fruit chew with a liquid center. Cortez’s sisters estimate they go through at least 1,000 pouches of gushers a week—around 10,000 pieces. “It’s crazy,” says customer-turned-employee Emily Martinez, noting devotees who drive in from as far as Austin and Corpus Christi, even though shipping is available.

Looking back, Cortez is agog that her childhood obsession has turned into a career. “I literally have gastritis now,” she says. “But I’ll never stop eating it. Chilito is my whole life.” 🍌

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**FROM LEFT:** Akaushi cattle at Peeler Farms; head cowboy Brad McDougall with owners Annabeth and Marianna Peeler.

# Where the Wagyu Roam

How a schoolteacher went from selling eggs as a hobby to running a boutique ranch

By Steven Craig Lindsey

A few yards down the gravel road from the Peeler Farms entrance, Ginger lies in the grass, swatting her tail under the South Texas sun. Guarded by a pack of fluffy Great Pyrenees, the amber-colored Akaushi—a breed of wagyu cattle—makes a fitting brand ambassador for the Peeler family, a family dedicated to ranching with an experimental edge.

Marianna Peeler, the owner of Peeler Farms, has become one of Texas' premier purveyors of wagyu, a type of cattle originally from Japan that's coveted for its tender, marbled beef. When she married Jason Peeler in 1990, she joined a family that's been ranching in South Texas for more than a century. But Marianna initially kept her job as a kindergarten teacher in El Campo.

As Marianna and Jason's family grew and they moved to a ranch in Floresville, 35 miles southeast of San Antonio, Marianna saw an opportunity to enhance the education of their four children. "We moved out here when they were young, and I thought we'll get chickens and grow a garden to teach them about good food, where it comes from, and taking care of yourself through what you eat."

**“The cows are very well taken care of, even down to the nitty gritty.”**

Marianna recalls.

When Marianna’s laying hens started producing more eggs than the family could eat, she gave away the extras at her gym. Soon people started asking where they could purchase eggs. That was 2009—the beginning of Marianna’s new business.

She chose the name Peeler Farms because it reflected the family’s menagerie of lambs, cows, and chickens, in addition to their flourishing garden. Plus,



the name distinguished her new business from her husband’s family’s operation—Peeler Family Ranch—30 miles south in Christine. When Austin restaurateur Larry McGuire started serving Peeler Farms’

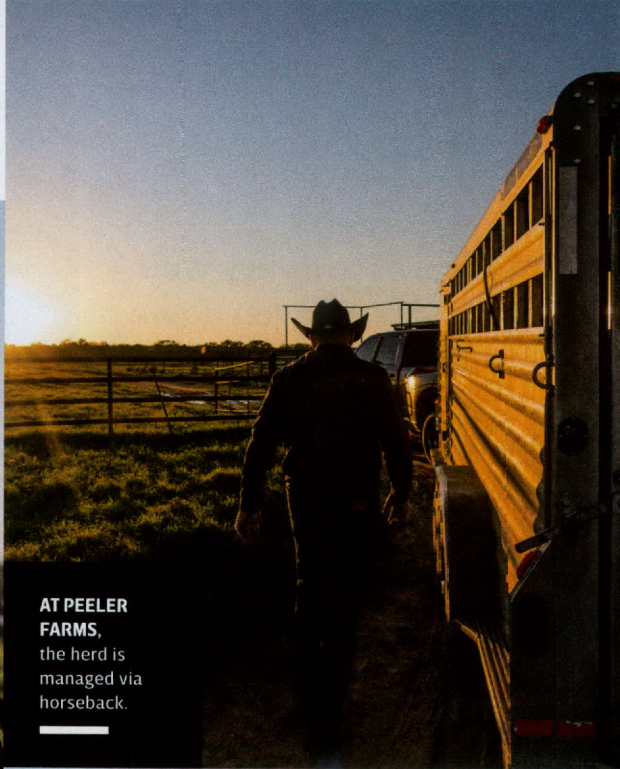
chicken and eggs in his restaurants, including Elizabeth Street Café and Fresa’s Chicken, Marianna realized there was a real demand for “never-ever” products, a food industry term referring to animals



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raised without antibiotics and hormones.

As Marianna's chicken and egg sales expanded, Jason was experimenting with raising Akaushi cattle. The breed is one of four defined as wagyu, a Japanese word that translates literally as Japanese (*wa*) cow (*gyu*). Marianna saw an opportunity in marketing the distinctive style of beef.

"I wanted to do the Akaushi because it was something no one else but just a few places were doing," she says. "When I decided to stop raising chickens, Jason handed it to me since I already had a relationship with chefs and farmers markets. I took it from there, getting it out to consumers and growing the brand and line of products."

By 2014, Peeler Farms had a herd of full-blood, purebred Akaushi cattle and was on its way to carving out a niche in the Texas restaurant scene by providing high-end beef with an appeal to chefs seeking locally sourced ingredients. Today, you can find Peeler Farms wagyu

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**"I wanted to do Akaushi because it was something no one else but just a few places were doing."**

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beef at restaurants and specialty retailers throughout the Hill Country.

Peeler Farms remains a family business. As the owner and public face of the company, Marianna manages the day-to-day operations in sales, marketing, and restaurant outreach. Jason, who runs

a separate Angus cattle ranch, helps out in areas of genetics, animal husbandry, grazing, nutrition, and animal handling. Three of the couple's four children also work for the business.

Marianna notes she now has 15 Akaushi bulls, so Peeler Farms can expand the



herd naturally. The farm also has its own meat-processing facility in nearby Poth, which results in minimal transportation for the cattle. Less stress, Marianna says, results in more tender meat.

“So many people have wagyu now and are trying to do what we’re doing,” she says. “But we own all of our bulls and all of our cows, so every baby is born right here, and we see them through the whole process.”

More than two dozen restaurants and other venues now carry Peeler Farms wagyu beef. They include Hotel Emma in San Antonio, Salt and Time in Austin, Cibolo Creek Brewing Company in Boerne, and District 6 in Georgetown, as well as farmers markets in Dripping Springs and downtown Austin.

A few blocks from the Alamo in San Antonio, Maverick Whiskey’s executive chef, Joshua Forrest Albert, says he loves working with Marianna because she’s receptive to the demanding needs of a chef and because of the quality of her product.

“The cows are very well taken care of, even down to the nitty gritty,” he says. “They don’t use any mechanical processes or motor vehicles to herd them. They’re grass-fed and grain-finished, and extreme care and caution is enforced in their breeding program.”

Albert says Peeler Farms also provides specialty cuts that other butchers might throw away, allowing him to get creative in the kitchen. Popular cuts at Maverick Whiskey include grilled tenderloins, rib-eyes, and beef shanks.




“I get to work with some of the best chefs in Texas whose talents are so great and really highlight our beef,” Marianna says. “I’m really lucky, but it’s an industry that’s constantly evolving as far as what people want—grain or grass-fed—and lots of competition.”

*Peeler Farms ships its wagyu beef packed in dry ice to customers in all 50 states. For ordering information, as well as a list of Austin- and San Antonio-area restaurants and markets that carry Peeler Farms beef, visit [peelerfarms.com](http://peelerfarms.com).*



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**FROM LEFT:** Head brewer Gino Guerrero, brewer Andrew Moran, owner Trevor Nearburg, and chef Ricardo Gutierrez at Beerburg.

# Land of Opportunity

Beerburg Brewing perfects the art of wildcrafting

By Laurel Miller

**T**revor Nearburg is foraging for evening primrose just steps away from Beerburg Brewing in Austin on a sunny spring morning. The familiar pink blooms that carpet the Hill Country at this time of year have been used as a medicine for hundreds of years, and Nearburg, who is an herbalist as well as a brewer, is developing a beer made with the flower. Oil from the seeds contains gamma-linolenic fatty acids, which aid brain function and are believed to ease anxiety and depression.

“Our first year, everything was a crisis, and I’m just now really able to focus entirely on the foraging,” Nearburg says of his brewery’s pandemic-era launch in January 2020. “It was always meant to be a meaningful experience, not a chore. In herbalism, one of the guiding principles is intent. The therapeutic properties of a plant are enhanced when harvested mindfully.”

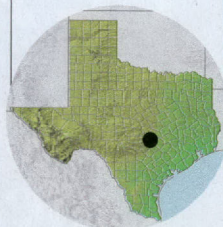
Nearburg and head brewer Gino Guerrero struggled to keep their new business afloat during the early days of the pandemic. Some of their core operational goals—such as eliminating solid and liquid waste—were delayed. But the brewery never wavered in its mission to produce hyper-local “wildcrafted” beers made from native plants including malted organic barley and endemic yeasts. Beerburg persevered, and

it’s now a popular stop along Fitzhugh Road, home to a cluster of breweries like fellow wildcrafter Jester King and distilleries like Treaty Oak in Dripping Springs.

Both Beerburg’s Seasonal and Wildcraft series incorporate plant materials such as dried leaves, stems, flowers, bark, seeds, and fruit. Wildcraft beers are hops-free, made instead with other bittering agents like yarrow, mugwort, and horehound. (Hops require a cooler growing climate, so most breweries source theirs from the Pacific Northwest.)

Nearburg became interested in wildcrafting when he was head brewer at Austin’s now-shuttered Uncle Billy’s Brewery & Smokehouse, where he befriended Guerrero, then a homebrewer. Nearburg’s fascination with native plants eventually led him to study under his mentor Ginger Webb at Austin’s Sacred Journey School of Herbalism.

**BEERBURG BREWING**  
13476 Fitzhugh Road,  
Austin  
512-265-0543  
Open Thu 3-8 p.m.,  
Fri-Sun 12-8 p.m.  
beerburgbrewing.com



**“In herbalism, one of the guiding principles is intent. The therapeutic properties of a plant are enhanced when harvested mindfully.”**

“My passion is for how we can use the land and natural resources without overburdening them,” adds Guerrero, who has a background in permaculture, or cultivating self-sufficient agricultural ecosystems. “I want to create a food forest at Beerburg that provides crops and allows wildlife to coexist.”

A rotating permaculture garden is under construction to provide vegetables and fruit for the brewery and on-site taqueria, La Violeta, run by Ricardo Gutierrez. The restaurant is named after the cattle ranch near Laredo where Gutierrez was raised, and the menu features Texas ingredients like Gulf shrimp and Alpine tomatoes.

While Beerburg is not the first brewery to utilize native plants, Beerburg's lack of adherence to specific beer styles is rare. “I've never cared about that,” he says. “To me, it's more about getting out in nature, connecting with a plant or experience, and building off of that.” Beerburg's distribution is limited, and its Wildcraft releases are only available for on-site consumption, which eliminates the need for a strict production schedule and forms a community around the brews.

That community spirit extends to the brewery's collaborations: Neighboring



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## A Yeast for the Senses

Community Cultures Yeast Lab primarily sells commercial yeast, but cultivating native yeasts is a passion project for owners Rob Green and Mara Young. The lab's microregional *Saccharomyces* strains are sourced directly from plants, flowers, and fruit from parts of the Hill Country, the Big Bend, and the Gulf Coast.

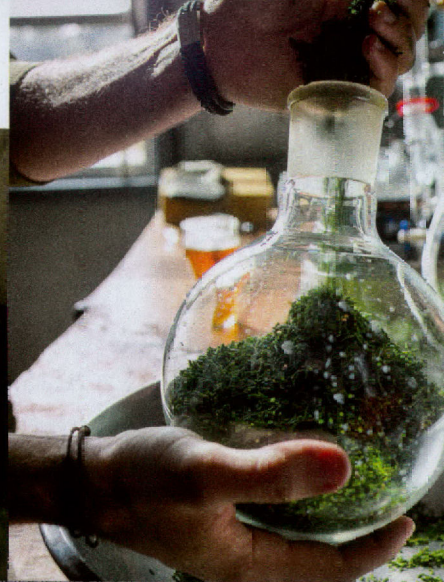
To obtain yeast samples, the couple takes swabs from native plants while backpacking and kayaking. The Window strain, one of the lab's most popular, was swabbed from a prickly pear on the Window Trail in Big Bend National Park.

The company cultivates the samples in a lab and propagates them for sale to breweries like Beerburg and Austin's Jester King. "The host plants don't actually contribute any flavor to the yeast," Young says. "That's determined by subspecies, as well as the grain, hops, and other ingredients, brewing method, and beer style. We just consider the host plants and their location to be part of the story."

Community Cultures also provides brewers like Nearburg with collection kits, so they can take swabs from their own land.

Beerburg is currently testing beers made with yeast taken from the property's persimmon, prickly pear, and juniper.

[ccyeastlab.com](http://ccyeastlab.com)



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Guerrero harvests juniper berries; extracting oil from juniper; Beerburg's Austin facility.

Treaty Oak Distilling provided casks for Beerburg's barrel-aged selections, and the seasonal Mesquite Bean and Pecan Brown Ale is made in partnership with San Saba's Oliver Pecan Company, Miche Bread, and Barton Springs Mill. Burg Lite is made from Texas-grown heritage Carolina Gold rice, also from Barton Springs Mill; while a bourbon cask-aged Russian Stout features cacao nibs from Austin's SRSLY Chocolate. Even the yeast is sourced locally from San Antonio's Community Cultures Yeast Lab

"We have so much respect for what Trevor and Gino are doing," says Mara Young, who founded the lab six years ago with her husband, microbiologist Rob Green. The lab provides Beerburg and other breweries with endemic yeasts collected from native plants like ocoti-

llo and Torrey yucca. "They have such passion for their ingredients as well as the Texas wildscape, and that really comes to life in their beers, which can't be found anywhere else in the world."

Beerburg's 15-acre property includes a 3,000-square-foot taproom and apothecary, a terrace with pastoral Hill Country views, a beer garden, a stage, a dog park, and a family area stocked with toys.

The acreage also provides ample space for foraging. Nearburg gathers everything from mugwort and yarrow to Eeebalm, vervain, and skull cap on the property. From his family's Brownwood property, Nearburg harvests wild plums, persimmons, dewberries, juniper berries, mustang grapes, and prickly ash. Local farmers and foragers provide seasonal crops like peaches and pecans.

Beerburg's hops-free beers vary in flavor depending upon the bittering agent and stage of fermentation. Nearburg says. The Mugwort ESB is bright and floral; Mustang Grape Porter has hints of chocolate and roasted coffee; and Golden Hound has a bracingly bitter profile, with notes of anise.

Nearburg also enjoys creating localized riffs on familiar ingredients. In place of spruce tips—popular in winter brews—he collects longleaf pine needles from Bastrop, which yield an “orange Hi-C flavor.” Rather than importing the European juniper berries used to make gin, Beerburg makes its Juniper IPA with Ashe juniper fruit. Tangy sumac berries are being tested for a Gose—a German style made with salt and coriander.

Tickle Tongue, one of Beerburg's most popular releases, contains prickly ash. The plant is related to the Sichuan peppercorn,

which grows throughout Asia. Nearburg recounts talking to a colleague who was using the imported berries in a beer. “He was completely shocked when I told him prickly ash grows all over our property,” he says. “A lot of the ingredients currently favored by craft brewers can be found right under our feet.”

Nearburg is captivated by the idea of creating beers with therapeutic applications—using plants like evening primrose for depression and anxiety, and vervain and skull cap to calm and support the nervous system. These beers will be

an offshoot of Beerburg's new on-site apothecary shop, which includes candles made by Lexi Nutter of Buzz in the Hills, and beard oils, soaps, and tinctures, some of which are made in collaboration with herbalist Raina McClellan of Austin's Folk Potions.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Nearburg is excited about the apothecary offerings and possible future expansions of the brand. “For our first two years, it wasn't always clear what Beerburg would become, but I couldn't be happier,” Nearburg says. “There's so much potential.”

**“They have such passion for their ingredients as well as the Texas wildscape, and that really comes to life in their beers.”**

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# TEXANA

## Bad Smoke, Good Smoke

A Texas rancher comes to terms with the destruction and benefits of wildfires

By John R. Erickson



**AFTER THE PERRYTON FIRE**, ranchers relied on imported hay to feed surviving livestock like this cow on the M-Cross Ranch.

**T**he winds were gusting across the Panhandle when I got the phone call on March 6, 2017: An electric line had blown down and started a fire on a neighboring ranch west of our place in the Canadian River valley. I stepped out the back door of the house and saw a cloud of smoke above the canyon rim, moving rapidly over the flat country. I rushed inside to notify my wife, Kris.

We weren't in the path of the fire yet, but our house sat in a deep canyon north of the river—and there was only one way out. We needed to evacuate. I glanced around the house. What do you take? Kris picked up her mandolin, and we both grabbed our laptops—mine contained all my writing files, including five unpublished Hank the Cowdog books.

We pointed our Ford Explorer out of the canyon and continued north toward Highway 281. When we got to the top of the caprock, we saw a huge cloud of dark smoke ahead of us. The wind was screaming out of the west, pushing the fire across 8 miles in about 20 minutes. The highway disappeared inside the towering cloud. We paused a moment and took a few pictures—snapshots from one of the worst days of our lives.

When March rolls around, people in Central Texas start thinking about wildflowers. Up here in the Panhandle, we're worrying about wildfires. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Perryton Fire—named for the nearby town—that burned 318,000 acres, making it the third largest in Texas history. The blaze was

**“When March rolls around, people in Central Texas start thinking about wildflowers. Up here in the Panhandle, we’re worrying about wildfires.”**

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## KAUFMAN, TEXAS

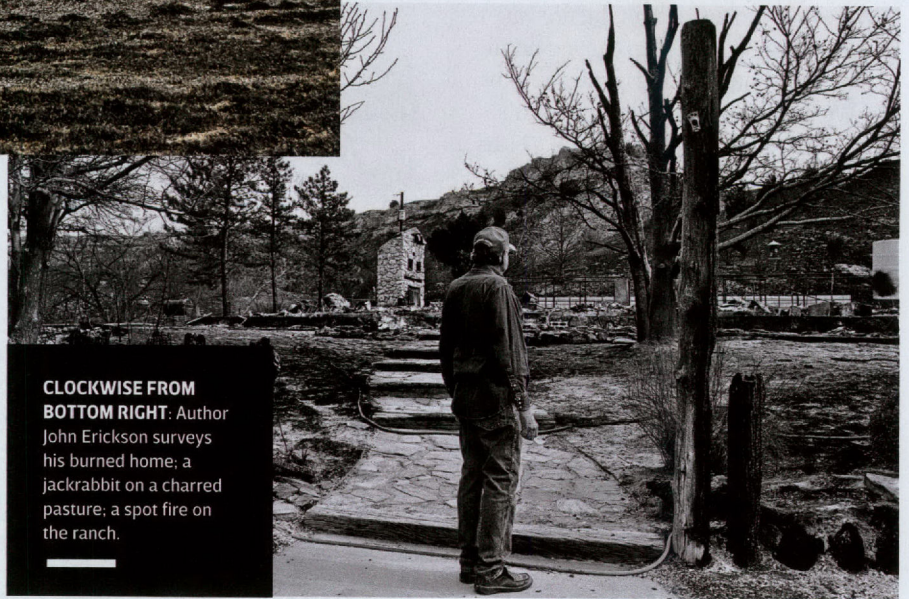
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The park was dedicated in 2005 and features nine large granite monuments, a large bronze eagle and a 9 ft. soldier. 5,500 names are featured on the Kaufman Veterans Spanish American - Afghanistan 4/5 replica Vietnam Wall.

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**CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT:** Author John Erickson surveys his burned home; a jackrabbit on a charred pasture; a spot fire on the ranch.

## The Case of the Monster Fire

Most authors would prefer to write about subjects they choose themselves. That wasn't necessarily the case with *Bad Smoke, Good Smoke: A Texas Rancher's View of Wildfire*. I published the book in 2021 after having a ringside seat to two of the largest wildfires in Texas history. When you get run over by a truck, you describe the truck and how it felt getting plowed over. I wanted to record my fire experiences on a day-to-day basis before they vanished in a fog of memory.

I wasn't sure I could incorporate those experiences into a Hank the Cowdog adventure—Hank books are supposed to be funny, after all. But I tried, and the result is *The Case of the Monster Fire*, the 71st book in the Hank series I launched in 1983. The book tells the tale of Slim Chance and cowdogs Hank and Drover encountering a grass-land fire like we've been seeing in the Panhandle. If you have kids in school, they might be learning about Texas wildfires from Hank and Drover. [hankthecowdog.com](http://hankthecowdog.com)

one of 32 wildfires that day in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas that collectively burned 1.3 million acres. The devastation included seven deaths, five injuries, 1,500 miles of burned fencing, 87 lost structures, and between 9,000 and 10,000 dead cattle.

We stayed the night in a small duplex in Perryton. During the night, the wind shifted, pushing the fire into the Canadian River valley. Our son Mark, who lives in Amarillo, established phone contact with a firefighter on scene. After hearing his account, Mark made the two-hour drive west, fearing the worst. He arrived late that night to find the whole valley ablaze.

Early the next morning, he called us. "Mom, Dad... I have terrible news. The house is gone." So were the bunkhouse, my writing office, 15 miles of fence, and 90% of our pastures. Incredibly, our cattle survived—how I don't know—but they were left with nothing to eat.

**In 1990, I had saved up enough cash to** make a down payment on those 5,700 acres of rough canyon country in Roberts County—one of Texas' least-populated counties with 924 square miles and only about 850 people. It has only one incorporated community—the county seat of Miami, with a population of 500.

I named the ranch the M-Cross after my great-grandfather's brand, which he registered in Crosby County in 1887. For the next 27 years, the ranch and I suffered together through every dry spell and shared the joy of every drop of rain.

Located on the north side of the river valley, the M-Cross is where the flat prairie drops suddenly into canyons 300-foot deep. It's not the best grass-growing ranch in the area, but to my eyes, it's incredibly beautiful—a cowboy's dream. And it turned out to be a great place to write Hank the Cowdog books.

We lost just about everything in the



fire, including 10 of Kris' handmade quilts, her scrapbooks and family photo albums, our library of thousands of books, and several filing cabinets filled with manuscripts, personal papers, and all my letters from three legendary Texas authors: John Graves, Elmer Kelton, and J. Evetts Haley. They were personal friends who helped light my path as an author.

We were knocked flat, as were many other ranchers. But disasters bring out the best in our species. People from our Methodist church in Perryton rushed in like angels with clothes, sheets, towels, food, and furniture. Truckloads of hay, feed, and fencing poured into drop-off points in Canadian, Lipscomb, and Wheeler. Five days after the fire, our son Scot brought a crew of 25 volunteers from Amarillo with heavy equipment and hauled off the corpses of our home, bunkhouse, and office.

Within three months, we were back on the ranch, living in a modular home. Scot had found a modular office to replace the one that had burned. Kris and I weren't sure we had the will or energy to rebuild on the location of our old home, but the boys insisted we should. And we did. It took 39 months for us to get back home.

**While the 2017 fire was devastating,** it wasn't the first wildfire to threaten the M-Cross Ranch. In March of 2006, two massive blazes known as the East Amarillo Complex fire burned near us for five days, forcing us to evacuate. The fires scorched nearly 1 million acres of grassland, jumping the Canadian River, and coming within 400 yards of our fence.

The wildfires of 2006 and 2017 introduced us to "megafires," the official term for fires that exceed 100,000 acres. This was a new and scary dimension of reality: massive blazes driven by powerful winds that destroy homes, threaten entire towns, kill people and livestock, and continue burning for days.

These landmark fires are now branded onto our collective memory. They made a joke of the old-time methods of fighting fire with shovels and wet gunny sacks. So why were we visited by these two mam-

moth fires in a span of 11 years, and what had changed? I've been giving it some thought and last May released a book about it, *Bad Smoke, Good Smoke: A Texas Rancher's View of Wildfire*.

To start with, the population has grown. In 1880, when my great-great-grandparents, Quaker farmers from Ohio, arrived at the village of Estacado near present-day Lubbock, the population of the Panhandle and South Plains was probably less than 1,000. Today, the region has over 1 million people.

The concurrent expansion of electrical service in rural areas brings more fire risks. In both 2006 and 2017, the formula that produced the fires included an accumulation of fuel after a wet summer, a dry winter, extreme winds, low humidity, and a breakdown in the electrical system.

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## **"The smell of smoke chills my gizzard, and I worry about getting sued if a burn gets out of hand."**

Fire suppression is also a factor. Modern societies extinguish fires to protect lives and property. The proliferation of weeds and brush that would have burned naturally has created a highly flammable environment. As Stephen J. Pyne, an Arizona-based fire scholar, notes, we've put ourselves on a collision course with nature. "Texas is big," Pyne wrote in his 2017 book, *The Great Plains: A Fire Survey*, "fire is bigger."

Efforts to preserve the High Plains grasslands could also be contributing to wildfires. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program has improved range conditions, but it's also introduced tall grasses that create more fuel in what was once a shortgrass prairie.

Journalist Christopher Collins, writing in the *Texas Observer* in August 2017,


said links between conservation and fire danger are not well understood. He cited a National Weather Service study that found a correlation between conservation programs and fire danger: While some landscapes have been restored to their historical natural state, the natural occurrence of wildfires has been suppressed.

Climate change also plays a role: The Earth has experienced a pattern of rising temperature for decades. Whatever the cause, it's bad news.

**Large destructive fires have become** a fact of life for those of us on the High Plains. Until recently, we've assumed we could conquer them with more and better firefighting equipment, but that hasn't worked out so well. For at least two generations, range-management experts have touted the benefits of prescribed burning, a preemptive strategy that calls for burning at times when you can contain the fire. It not only protects property but improves the prairie environment.

The truth is, fire is a natural part of prairie ecology, and our ranch has benefited from the 2017 fire. It cleared out juniper trees, which can suck up to 30 gallons of water daily, along with broomweed and cactus. Springs have emerged in new places, while others have increased their flows, providing water for wildlife and fostering the growth of willow, cottonwood, and Western soapberry trees.

Thirty-nine months after the fire, we moved into our new home in the canyon. Kris designed it with big windows to provide inspiring views of this beautiful place. We want to live in harmony with our land and to be good stewards. I'm persuaded that there's such a thing as "good smoke," a term used by advocates of prescribed burning, but I'm not quite ready to try it in our rough county. The smell of smoke chills my gizzard, and I worry about getting sued if a burn gets out of hand.

The part of my brain that reads books on fire ecology is trying to whisper soothing words to the part that doesn't like the smell of smoke. We haven't worked it out yet, but we're still talking. 

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[GalvestonCM.org](http://GalvestonCM.org)  
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### Oleander Festival

April 23, 2022  
[Oleander.org](http://Oleander.org)

The International Oleander Society will hold its annual festival Saturday, April 23, at the Betty Head Oleander Garden Park, 2624 Sealy in Galveston—the Oleander City. Here, participants can see more than 40 varieties of oleanders and learn more about these beautiful plants, including how to grow them. The festival will also feature musical entertainment and oleanders for purchase.



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[GalvestonNavalMuseum.com](http://GalvestonNavalMuseum.com)  
409.770.3196

The Galveston Naval Museum is home to the USS Cavalla, one of the most accomplished World War II submarines open to the public today. The destroyer escort, USS Stewart, once the presidential escort to FDR, is the last of its class in the world. Both vessels are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Taking a self-guided tour, you'll learn how sailors and submariners lived, slept and worked together as a fighting force over the Atlantic and under the Pacific. "Climb Aboard!"



## 20th Annual Galveston FeatherFest

[GalvestonFeatherFest.com](http://GalvestonFeatherFest.com)

832.459.5533

Galveston's annual birding and nature photography festival is back! Experience spring migration at the 20th Anniversary of FeatherFest, April 21-24. Perfect for all skill levels, FeatherFest offers field trips and workshops lead by experts Kevin Karlson, Hector Astorga, Greg Miller and more. As one of the top birding locations in the county, you don't want to miss out. Register online today!



## Moody Mansion

[MoodyMansion.org](http://MoodyMansion.org)

409.762.7668

Galveston's Moody Mansion at 2618 Broadway is meticulously restored and filled with original furnishings. Self-guided audio tours and premium behind-the-scenes guided tours are available. Rotating exhibits of special interest are installed throughout the year. Moody Mansion is available events, wedding receptions and bridal photography, and offers group discounts. Open daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.



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# EVENTS



## Shuck, Slurp, Repeat

Fulton's Oysterfest pulls out all the stops for the beloved Gulf Coast mollusk

Every March, when Texas oysters are in their prime season, the Fulton Volunteer Fire Department celebrates the local bivalve with Oysterfest. The four-day event includes carnival rides, games, live music, and tens of thousands of oysters.

The main draw is the oyster-eating contest, where contestants are given bags full of raw oysters to gulp down in 10 minutes. "Some people sit there and put their oysters on crackers as they eat them," says Sharron Loflin, president of the Fulton Oysterfest Organization. "They don't win." The record for the men's contest is over 300 oysters.

Oysterfest started in 1979 to raise funds for a new fire station. Since the new station was built in 2014, proceeds now go toward equipment, training, and maintenance. More than 59,000 oysters were sold at the 2020 festival (the 2021 festival was canceled). This year's event runs March 3-6 and is expected to have more than 30,000 attendees.

Two large tents hold arts and crafts and food vendors. Jewelry, paintings, stained glass, pottery, and more are available from craft booths, while the food tent sells beer, Vietnamese egg rolls, turkey legs, shrimp, and oysters.

Don't miss the oyster-decorating contest, where participants show just how creative they can get with oyster shells. "We've had people make beautiful oyster shell mirrors, oyster shell tables, and even an oyster lamp," Loflin says. "It depends on how crafty you want to get." —Amanda Ogle

**Oysterfest**  
March 3-6  
Fulton Beach Park,  
North Casterline Drive  
[fultonoysterfest.org](http://fultonoysterfest.org)

### BIG BEND COUNTRY

#### ALPINE

##### Texas as Art

Through April 2

The images in this exhibit are designed to showcase the diversity of Texas landscapes as seen from Earth's orbit, including the expression of natural ecosystem elements, geologic features, and the expanding human footprint on the natural landscape. Two themes connect the settings selected for the 2022 exhibit tour: Texas' natural ecoregions and Texas' state parks, historic areas, natural areas, and wildlife management areas.

Museum of the Big Bend,  
400 N. Harrison St., C-101.  
432-837-8145;  
[museumofthebigbend.com](http://museumofthebigbend.com)

#### EL PASO

##### Frida

March 19

This fusion of opera, Mexican folkloric and mariachi music, and Broadway musical theater is performed in Spanish and English with projected translations. The show chronicles Frida Kahlo's life—from her teenage revolutionary politics to her early death—through music, monologue, and dance. The opera showcases the major events of Kahlo's life that influenced her art.

Abraham Chavez Theatre,  
1 Civic Center Plaza. 915-581-5534;  
[epopera.org](http://epopera.org)

#### ODESSA

##### Taste of the Permian Basin

March 31

Savor the culinary delights of over 30 Permian Basin restaurants and sample curated desserts from the area. Bush Convention Center,  
105 N. Main St. [facebook.com/tastethebasin](https://www.facebook.com/tastethebasin)

### GULF COAST

#### BAY CITY

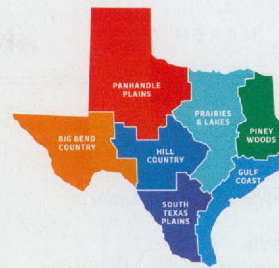
##### Matagorda County Fair and Livestock Show

Through March 6

The Matagorda County Fair and Livestock Exposition Association has produced a local county fair

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and livestock show continually since 1944. Activities include team roping, a heifer show and sale, a barbecue cookoff, a food show and auction, a rodeo, a talent show, and a carnival. *Matagorda Fair Grounds*, 4511 FM 2668, 979-245-2454; [matagordacountyfair.com](http://matagordacountyfair.com)

### BEAUMONT

#### Young Men's Business League South Texas State Fair and Rodeo March 24-April 3

The Young Men's Business League South Texas State Fair and Rodeo brings thousands of visitors to Beaumont each spring with food, entertainment, and carnival rides. The Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association showcases the country's top cowboys and cowgirls at the YMBL Championship Rodeo while locals present their masterpieces at the School Art, Quilt, and Photo Show. There's a livestock and poultry show as well as a youth animal auction, kids' fun zone, and other festivities. *Ford Park Entertainment Complex*, 5115 Interstate 10 Access Road, 409-832-9991; [beaumontcvb.com/events](http://beaumontcvb.com/events)

### BRAZORIA

#### Brazoria Heritage Day March 5

Celebrate the anniversary of the Republic of Texas with a cattle drive parade, car show, vendors, and a performance by Shake Rattle and Roll. *Brazoria Civic Center*, 202 W. Smith St, 979-824-0455; [brazoriahf.org/new](http://brazoriahf.org/new)

### GALVESTON

#### Lyle Lovett and his Acoustic Group in Concert March 25-26

The Texas country crooner presents an intimate concert that puts a different spin on country classics. *The Grand 1894 Opera House*, 2020 Postoffice St, 800-821-1894; [thegrand.com](http://thegrand.com)

### HOUSTON

#### Come From Away March 22-April 3

Houston's Theatre Under the Stars presents this *New York Times* Critics' Pick that takes you into the heart of the true story of 7,000 stranded passengers and the

small town in Newfoundland that welcomed them. At first, cultures clashed and nerves ran high, but unease eventually turned into trust, and gratitude grew into enduring friendships. *Theatre Under the Stars/Hobby Center*, 800 Bagby St, 713-558-2600; [tuts.com](http://tuts.com)

### LAKE JACKSON

#### Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead March 3-6

In this "unauthorized" parody, taking place 10 years after the events of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, Charlie Brown's beagle has rabies, and his world is turned upside down by teenage discoveries and his group of misfit friends. *Brazosport College*, 500 College Blvd, 979-230-3271; [brazosport.edu/drama](http://brazosport.edu/drama)

### LAKE JACKSON

#### Doggy Dash 5K March 12

The 5K course begins at the entrance to the Lake Jackson Recreation Center parking lot. The route continues through MacLean Park and back into the wooded area, passes by the sand volleyball court, winds around the large pavilion, and ends at the small pavilion. Run or walk the distance, and bring your furry friends. *MacLean Park*, 93 Lake Road, 979-297-4533; [ljdoggydash.com](http://ljdoggydash.com)

### LAKE JACKSON

#### Dash for Donuts 1K March 26

This event is geared toward families, weekend warriors, and the below-average athlete. Runners and walkers are encouraged to dress in costume for a chance to win prizes. *MacLean Park*, 93 Lake Road, 979-297-4533; [lakejackson-tx.gov](http://lakejackson-tx.gov)

### ORANGE

#### Fiddler on the Roof March 6

Tony Award-winning director Bartlett Sher brings his fresh take on the beloved musical as *Fiddler on the Roof* begins a North American tour direct from Broadway. The cast and orchestra tell this heartwarming story of fathers and daughters, husbands and wives,

and the timeless traditions that define faith and family. *Lutcher Theater for the Performing Arts*, 707 Main Ave, 409-886-5535; [lutcher.org](http://lutcher.org)

### PORT ARANSAS

#### Margarita Madness March 11-April 8

There can only be one "Best Margarita in Port Aransas," and every year during Margarita Madness, Port A is dedicated to finding it. This bracket-style competition pits local restaurants' best margaritas against each other in weekly eliminations until a winner is crowned. After you try them, you get to vote for your favorites. *Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce*, 403 W. Cotter Ave, 361-749-5919; [visitportaransas.com](http://visitportaransas.com)

### ROCKPORT

#### Whooping Crane Strut March 5

The 34th annual strut features a 2-mile walk and 5K and 10K runs. The walk remains in the beach area while the 5K and 10K continues to Austin and Water streets. *Rockport Beach*, 100 Seabreeze Drive, 361-727-2158; [rockport-fulton.org](http://rockport-fulton.org)

### SUGAR LAND

#### Ana Gabriel in Concert March 20

The versatile Mexican singer has been releasing albums for more than 40 years in a range of genres, from mariachi to pop to Latin rock. *Smart Financial Centre at Sugar Land*, 18111 Lexington Blvd, 281-207-6278; [smartfinancialcentre.net](http://smartfinancialcentre.net)

### SURFSIDE BEACH

#### St. Patrick's Day Parade March 10

One of the longest-lasting traditions at Surfside Beach, this annual event includes a parade where part of the route goes down the beach. Parade participants throw free beads and candy to the crowd. In addition to the parade, there are costume contests, a social, fundraisers, and a reenactment of the Battle of Fort Velasco. *Surfside Beach City Hall*, 1304 Monument Drive, 979-233-1531; [beachblarney.com](http://beachblarney.com)

### VICTORIA

#### Coppelia

March 5-6

The Victoria Ballet Theatre presents a lively and amusing ballet that tells a delightful tale of mischief, mistaken identities, and an eccentric doll-maker. *Leo J. Welder Center for the Performing Arts*, 214 N. Main St, 361-485-8540; [victoriaballet.org](http://victoriaballet.org)

### HILL COUNTRY

### AUSTIN

#### Daniel Johnston: I Live My Broken Dreams

Through March 20

This is the first major museum survey of visual art and music by Austin artist Daniel Johnston (1961-2019). While Johnston is best known for his poignant songs about love and loss, this exhibition pairs reflections on his music career with his vibrant drawings as well as film and video documentation, collected ephemera, and personal memorabilia, offering the opportunity to view the cross-disciplinary, holistic nature of his work and legacy together for the first time. *The Contemporary Austin, Jones Center*, 700 Congress Ave, 512-453-5312; [thecontemporaryaustin.org](http://thecontemporaryaustin.org)

### AUSTIN

#### SXSW Festival

March 11-20

Every spring, crowds descend on downtown Austin to experience the world-renowned SXSW conference and festivals. Consisting of three main components—Interactive, Music, and Film—each category brings top creatives and global professionals together to collaborate during this exciting 10-day event. *Austin Convention Center and Downtown Austin*, 500 E. Cesar Chavez St, 512-404-4000; [sxsw.com](http://sxsw.com)

### AUSTIN

#### Rodeo Austin

March 12-26

Over the years, Rodeo Austin has grown from a show with 16 animals into one of Austin's premier events featuring professional

rodeo events, daily concerts, and a livestock show. *Travis County Expo Center, 7311 Decker Lane. 512-919-3000; rodeoaustin.com*

#### AUSTIN

##### World Golf Championships-Dell Technologies Match Play

March 23-27

The world's top 64 professional golfers compete in this tournament that draws the likes of Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson to Central Texas. The setting of the course's back nine along Lake Austin allows spectators to watch the action by boat. *Austin Country Club, 4408 Long Champ Drive. 512-328-0090; pgatour.com/tournaments/wgc-dell-technologies-match-play.html*

#### AUSTIN

##### Amadeus

March 24-April 9

This Tony Award-winning play, a fictionalized history of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, features stirring moments of Mozart's beloved compositions. *Ground Floor Theatre, 979 Springdale Road. 512-850-4849; penfoldtheatre.org/event/amadeus*

#### AUSTIN

##### NASCAR at COTA

March 25-27

The second annual NASCAR weekend at Circuit of The Americas features the NASCAR Cup Series, Xfinity Series, and Camping World Truck Series. *Circuit of The Americas Boulevard. 833-450-2864; nascaratcota.com*

#### BANDERA

##### Women's Ranch Rodeo and Kids' Mutton Bustin'

March 5

This rodeo is presented by the Bandera ProRodeo Association and features an evening with a kids' mutton-busting contest followed by an all-women rodeo that includes steer roping and branding and a cowhide race. *Mansfield Park, 2886 SH 16 North. 830-460-1071; banderaprrodeo.org*

#### BANDERA

##### Fiber and Arts Week and Festival

March 8-12

Celebrating Texas wool, mohair, and alpaca fiber, the Bandera Fiber and Arts Week and Festival offers classes and demonstrations on spinning and weaving, the Fiber-a-Torium, a shopping experience with fiber producers and artists, and live animals. *The Sheepwalk Ranch, 5305 SH 173. 949-400-4225; banderafiberandarts.com*

#### BANDERA

##### Stargazing

March 15

Explore the night sky with a park ranger. Binoculars and a folding chair are recommended but not required. *Hill Country State Natural Area, 10600 Bandera Creek Road. 830-796-4413; tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/hill-country*

#### BANDERA

##### Bluebonnet Storytime and Craft

March 17

Learn about the state flower of Texas and paint a picture to take home. *Hill Country State Natural Area, 10600 Bandera Creek Road. 830-796-4413; tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/hill-country*

#### BANDERA

##### Guided Sunrise Hike

March 18

Start your day with a scenic hike up to an overlook peak. The hike is 2.4 miles total. Trails include rocky, uneven walking surfaces. Bring your own drinking water. *Hill Country State Natural Area, 10600 Bandera Creek Road. 830-796-4413; tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/hill-country*

#### BANDERA

##### Thunder in the Hill Country and

##### Bandera Bike Week

March 24-27

The 20th annual Thunder in the Hills Bike Rally takes place during Bandera Bike Week. Activities include a poker run, bike show, tattoo contest, cowboy rodeo, concerts, and shopping from vendors. *Mansfield Park, 2886 SH 16 North. 409-655-8800; bikerralliesoftexas.com*

#### BRACKETTVILLE

##### Fort Clark Days

March 4-5

Living historians tell stories of Fort Clark, an old military fort built in 1852. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Fort Clark was in operation for almost 100 years. Festivities include arts and crafts, food, and lots of activities. *Fort Clark Springs, 300 US 90. 830-563-2493; fortclarkdays.org*

#### BURNET

##### Bluebonnet Airshow

March 19

The 30th annual Bluebonnet Air Show is full of aerobatics, ground acts, and kids' activities. The U.S. Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt Demonstration Team puts on a show, and the 501st 1st Legion Storm-troopers give a nod to *Star Wars* culture. Ike's Bird, a 1955 Aero

Commander L-26B, is available for rides, and C47s and B-52s take to the sky. There are also weapons demonstrations and General Patton living historians. *Kate Craddock Field, Burnet Municipal Airport, 2302 S. Water St. 512-756-2226; bluebonnetairshow.com*

#### BURNET

##### Hill Country Lawn and Garden Show

March 26

A day filled with all things gardening and horticulture brings spring to Burnet. Shop for plants of all kinds including native species, vegetables, and flowers. Artisans offer unique gifts, and kids' activities, food, a silent auction, presentations, and demonstrations complete the day. *Burnet County Agrilife Building, 607 N. Vandevener St. 512-756-3059; burnetcountyhighlandlakesmasterygardener.org*

#### FREDERICKSBURG

##### Pride in the Pacific Living History Reenactment

March 12

Hear the rattling of machine guns, feel the heat of the flamethrower, and smell the powder of rifle fire during Pride in the Pacific. This program features a battle reenactment with period vehicles and weaponry from both sides of the War in the Pacific. *National Museum of the Pacific War Combat Zone, 508 E. Austin St. 830-997-8600; pacificwarmuseum.org*

#### FREDERICKSBURG

##### Mud Dauber Festival and Chili Cookoff

March 19

Named for the pesky insect, this open chili cookoff and live music festival shows why Luckenbach has some of the best mud in the universe. *Luckenbach Texas, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. luckenbachtexas.com*

#### FREDERICKSBURG

##### Hill Country Indian Artifact Show

March 26

The show features a wide variety of Native American artifacts and other collectibles from Texas and around the country, including arrowheads, pottery, beads, cases, and books. There are also door prizes, and food is available for purchase. *Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, 432 Lady Bird Drive. hillcountryindianartifacts.com*

#### INGRAM

##### They Played a Rigged Game

March 18-20, 25-27, April 1-3

The Hill Country Arts Foundation

presents this new play by local playwright David R. Remschel. Michael Dysart has spent his autumn years at Windy Acres Retirement Center relishing his reputation, superiority over others, and the unquestioning loyalty of his fellow resident Thomas. Michael's perfect utopia sours with the sudden appearance of new resident Alice Dewitt, who is still reeling from the loss of her business and the inevitable decline of her independence for reasons she has yet to come to terms with. *Hill Country Arts Foundation, 120 Point Theatre Road. 830-367-5121; hcacf.com*

#### KERRVILLE

##### Kerr Arts and Cultural Center Art Exhibits

Through April 26

For more than 20 years, the Kerr Arts and Cultural Center has presented three separate art exhibits in three galleries—the James Avery Gallery, Aline Cornels Gallery, and James and SJ Derby Gallery—spanning 6,500 square feet and supporting a wide variety of installations and media. *Kerr Arts and Cultural Center, 228 Earl Garrett St. 830-895-2911; kacckerrville.com*

#### LLANO

##### Llano Earth Art Fest

March 11-13

More than 6,000 people come out each year to the banks of the Llano River for Llano Earth Art Fest—home of the World Rock Stacking Championships. Try your hand at stacking rocks sky high or in a thoughtful, balanced arrangement to create beautiful rock art in and along the Llano River. The Free Flow on the Llano vintage Volkswagen car show is also held during the festival, and it is a great opportunity to see colorful, vintage VWs. There are also vendor booths and live entertainment, and many festivalgoers wear costumes. *Grenwelge Park, 199 E. Haynie St. 325-247-5354; llanoearthartfest.org*

#### NEW BRAUNFELS

##### Historic Gruene's Texas Independence Day Celebration

March 2

To celebrate the 186th anniversary of Texas independence, Gruene Historic District is throwing a Texas-size celebration with live music. *Gruene Historic District, 1601 Hunter Road. 830-629-5077; gruenetexas.com*

#### NEW BRAUNFELS

##### Kinderschuhe 5K Run and Walk

March 5

New Braunfels Utilities partnered



with Communities in Schools in 2004 to create Kinderschuhe 5K Run and Walk to purchase shoes for at-risk students within their school network. Since then, the annual event has become a staple with people of all ages coming out to support the cause and get some exercise. *Gruene Hall, 1281 Gruene Road. 830-629-8454; nbutexas.com/events/kinderschuhe*

#### SPRING BRANCH

##### Clay Shoot

March 17

Sporting clay enthusiasts from all over Texas gather to bust clays for bragging rights and prizes. Beginners and experts are welcome to participate in a 15-station course at a privately owned ranch in the heart of the Texas Hill Country. *Good Bull Ranch, 8415 FM 311. 830-438-4285; bsbchamber.com*

#### PANHANDLE PLAINS

##### ABILENE

##### Abilene Philharmonic in Concert:

##### The Planets

March 5

Conductor David Itkin leads the Abilene Philharmonic as it performs *The Planets* by English composer Gustav Holst, with choreographed visuals presented by visual artist Adrian Wyard. *Abilene Convention Center, 1100 N. Sixth St. 325-677-6710; abilenephilharmonic.org/shows/the-planets/*

##### ABILENE

##### Outlaws and Legends Music Fest

March 25-26

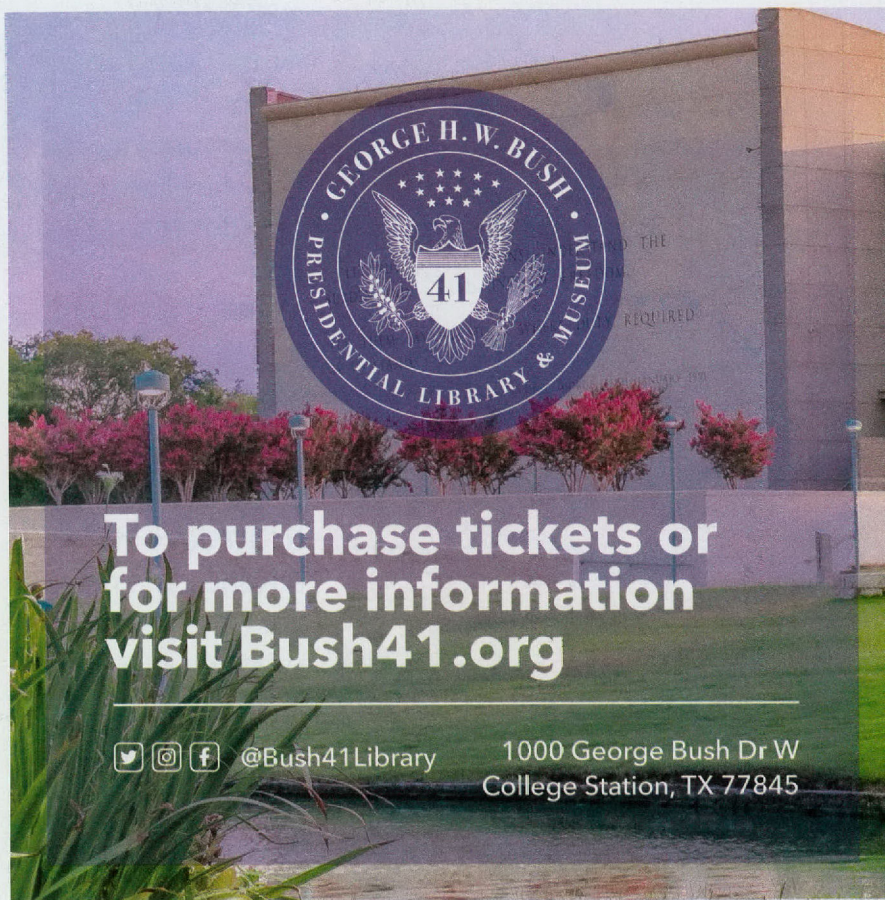
The 11th annual Outlaws and Legends Music Fest, benefiting Ben Richey Boys Ranch, returns to the Back Porch of Texas. Artists include Jack Ingram, Micky and the Motorcars, Ariel Hutchins, Chad Cooke Band, Band of Heathens, and Brent Cobb. *Back Porch of Texas, 3350 N. Clack St. 325-676-2556; outlawsandlegends.com/tickets*

##### CANYON

##### Southwest Abstractions of Emil Bisttram

Through March 19

The West Texas A&M University Art Program and the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum jointly present *Southwest Abstractions of Emil Bisttram*, an exhibition of the artist's late-career paintings from the Ladd Collection. Emil Bisttram (1895-1976) was one of the leading painters in the Southwest during the 20th century. This is the first time this group of works has been exhibited together in a museum



To purchase tickets or for more information visit [Bush41.org](http://Bush41.org)

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[visitgarlandtx.com](https://visitgarlandtx.com)

or public setting. *Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum*, 2503 Fourth Ave. 806-651-2244; [panhandleplains.org](https://panhandleplains.org)

**LEVELLAND**

**ABC Pro Rodeo**

March 25-April 2

Watch rodeo feats including saddle bronc, bareback, steer wrestling, calf roping, team roping, barrel racing, bull riding, mutton bustin', and bull fighting. *Mallet Event Center*, 2320 US 385 South. 806-894-4161; [abcrodeo.com](https://abcrodeo.com)

**LUBBOCK**

**Rent**

March 15

For 25 years, Jonathan Larson's Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical has inspired audiences to choose love over fear and to live without regret. *Rent* follows a year in the lives of a diverse group of artists and friends struggling to follow their dreams without selling out. *The Buddy Holly Hall of Performing Arts and Sciences*, 1300 Mac Davis Lane. 806-792-8339; [buddyhollyhall.com/event/rent](https://buddyhollyhall.com/event/rent)

**SAN ANGELO**

**A Glimpse of Glory: Works by Sedrick and Letitia Huckaby**

Through March 20

A wide range of artworks by husband and wife Sedrick and Letitia Huckaby are on display. Sedrick was named Texas State Artist for 2018, and his work is found in collections and museums around the world, as are the works of Letitia. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts*, 1 Love St. 325-653-3333; [samfa.org](https://samfa.org)

**PINEY WOODS**

**HUNTSVILLE**

**Sam Houston's Birthday and Texas Independence Day Celebration**

March 2

March 2 isn't just Texas Independence Day, it's Sam Houston's birthday as well. Celebrate accordingly with music, Texas baptisms, lunch, and speakers giving presentations about Texas history. *Oakwood Cemetery*, 813 Ryan's Ferry Road. 936-291-9726; [huntsvilletexas.com/236/texas-independence-day-celebration](https://huntsvilletexas.com/236/texas-independence-day-celebration)

**HUNTSVILLE**

**Rusty, Chippy, Vintage, and Repurposed Show**

March 12-13

Over 75 dealers from across the country bring their treasures for this annual two-day show.

Antiques, vintage and collectible finds, repurposed items, furniture, estate jewelry, turquoise, sterling silver, holiday decor, glassware, boutique items, yard art, old tools, plants, homemade jams and jellies, and homemade soaps are just some of the items on offer. The facility is indoors and climate controlled. Kids ages 12 and under get in free. *Walker County Fairgrounds*, 3925 SH 30 West. 936-661-2545; [facebook.com/RustyChippy](https://facebook.com/RustyChippy)

#### HUNTSVILLE

##### **Herb Festival at the Wynne Home** March 26

The annual Herb Festival at the Wynne Home features a large selection of locally grown herbs, perennials, native plants, vegetables, and bulbs. Speakers, herbal and garden vendors, musicians, and artists round out the day's events. The historic Wynne Home Arts Center and its current art exhibition are open to visitors. *Wynne Home Arts Center*, 1428 11th St. 936-891-5024; [texasthymeunit.org](http://texasthymeunit.org)

#### JEFFERSON

##### **Medieval Wine Faire**

March 19

A wine tavern in historic downtown Jefferson hosts this annual wine festival that's filled with chivalry, romance, and merriment. Indulge in wine, beer, mead, live music, and food, and partake in the costume contest. *KnightLight Tavern Olde World Restaurant*, 202 N. Walnut St. 903-665-8546; [knightlighttheater.com](http://knightlighttheater.com)

#### JEFFERSON

##### **Shamrocks and Shenanigans**

March 19

Put on your best St. Patty's get-up and come to historic downtown Jefferson for Shamrocks and Shenanigans. Sip, shop, and save at downtown stores offering samples of their Irish drinks. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled for the shamrocks. *Historic Downtown Jefferson*. 903-665-3733; [visitjeffersontexas.com/jefferson-texas-events](http://visitjeffersontexas.com/jefferson-texas-events)

#### JEFFERSON

##### **St. Patrick's Day Express**

March 19

Celebrate the holiday aboard the St. Patrick's Day Express. The historic depot is decked out in green, and the train ride includes a stop at the Diamond Don Gator Pit for alligator feeding. Narrated historical day tours are offered at 12:30 and 2:30 p.m. *Historic Jefferson Railway*, 400 E. Austin St. 903-742-2041; [diamonddonempire.com](http://diamonddonempire.com)

#### JEFFERSON

##### **March Miata Madness**

March 26

This annual event open to Mazda Miatas is held in the 100 block of East Austin Street. The block in front of the Jefferson General Store is blocked off for a Show 'n' Shine from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. The car show is open to spectators at no charge. Other events include a dinner at Riverport Barbecue, the Caddo Lake run, lunch at Big Pines Lodge, and a special tour of Garage Mahal. *Various locations*. 903-665-3733; [visitjeffersontexas.com](http://visitjeffersontexas.com)

#### PALESTINE

##### **Dogwood Festival**

March 19

Presented by the Palestine Area Chamber of Commerce, the Dogwood Trails Festival takes place every year on the first weekend of the Dogwood Celebration. The daylong event in downtown and Old Town Palestine offers a parade, craft and novelty vendors, food vendors, art galleries, street entertainment, live music, and other festivities. *Downtown and Old Town Palestine*, 825 W. Spring St. 903-723-3014; [visitpalestine.com/dogwood](http://visitpalestine.com/dogwood)

#### TYLER

##### **Viva Momix**

March 22

The group Momix is known for its dance and illusion performances, and *Viva Momix* combines athletic dance, music, costumes, and props to create an entertaining multimedia experience. The show blends the repertoire of Momix's most iconic works with new additions. *R. Don Cowan Fine and Performing Arts Center*, 3900 University Blvd., FAC 1120. 903-566-7424; [cowancenter.org](http://cowancenter.org)

#### WOODVILLE

##### **Tyler County Dogwood Festival** March 19-April 2

This festival is the oldest outdoor historical pageant in the South and calls attention to the beauty of the area. The festival features live bluegrass, gospel, and country music; a village tour; demonstrations; exhibits; trail rides, a parade; a rodeo; a 5K fun run; a car and motorcycle exhibit; arts and crafts; food; a coronation ceremony; a historical play; and fireworks. The 2022 festival includes three weekends of activities: the Festival of Arts weekend (March 19-20), Western Weekend (March 25-26), and Queen's Weekend (April 2). *Various locations*. 409-283-2234; [tylercountydogwoodfestival.org](http://tylercountydogwoodfestival.org)

#### PRAIRIES AND LAKES

#### BURTON

##### **Texas Ranger Day**

March 12

Discover Burton's history at Texas Ranger Day. The event includes the Annie Maud Avis Memorial Fajita and Bean Cookoff and exhibitions of Texas Ranger camp life as it was in the 1880s. There are folklife demonstrations, crafts, and tours of the Railroad Depot and Burton Farmer's Cotton Gin. All proceeds go toward restoration efforts for the Mt. Zion Historical Chapel. *Burton Heritage Society*, 507 N. Railroad St. 979-353-0050; [burtonheritagesociety.org](http://burtonheritagesociety.org)

#### BURTON

##### **La Bahia Antique Show**

March 25-April 2

Dealers across the country provide antiques, collectibles, and repurposed and vintage items in the historic 1902 La Bahia Hall. Outside dealers offer a variety of vintage goods. There is country cooking all day and free admission and parking. The show is part of the Round Top Antique Festival weekend. *La Bahia Turn Verein Dance Hall*, 550 SH 237. 979-289-2684; [labahiaantiques.com](http://labahiaantiques.com)

#### COLLEGE STATION

##### **Living History Weekend**

March 26-27

The Museum of the American GI's Living History Weekend is the largest event of its kind in Texas, with visitors from across the nation coming to view living-history displays, shop in the military swap meet, witness the roar of tanks in the WWII battle reenactments, and watch a WWI trench battle. Upon entering the museum property, attendees can ride in a WWII 2.5 ton CCKW truck or modern Humvee to the reenactment fields where all of the activities take place. Chick-fil-A, Kona Ice, and other food vendors are on-site. *Museum of the American GI*, 19124 SH 6 South. 979-690-0501; [americangimuseum.org/events/living-history-weekend](http://americangimuseum.org/events/living-history-weekend)

#### CORSICANA

##### **Texas Artists Invitational Show and Sale**

Through March 25

This popular annual exhibition features special artist demonstration events and select pieces available for purchase. *Pearce Museum*, 3100 W. Collin St. 903-875-7438; [pearcemuseum.com](http://pearcemuseum.com)



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**DALLAS**

**The How To Be Project: Ten Plays for Racial Justice**

Through March 6

This event features 10 one-act plays by 10 Black playwrights inspired by and in conversation with Ibram X. Kendi's book *How to Be an Antiracist*. At a time when Ta-Nehisi Coates, Nikole Hannah-Jones, and other prominent Black writers are engaged in a dialogue about America's racial reckoning, *The How To Be Project*, produced in partnership with PEN America, seeks to present works that continue the dialogue in the enduring struggle for racial justice. *Bishop Arts Theatre Center*, 215 S. Tyler St. 214-948-0716; [bishopartstheatre.org/theatre-series](http://bishopartstheatre.org/theatre-series)

**DALLAS**

**North Texas Irish Festival**

March 4-6

The event, one of the largest Irish festivals in the United States, features music, dancing, cultural performances, and education. There are also whiskey tastings, horse displays, Celtic storytelling, animal rescue groups, foods like Shepherd's pie and Irish stew, dozens of activities for kids, and chef demonstrations. *Fair Park*, 3809 Grand Ave. 214-823-4370; [ntif.org](http://ntif.org)

**DENTON**

**Texas Storytelling Festival**

March 10-13

Hear more than 60 storytellers tell Texas tales and enjoy the liars contest, sacred stories, ghost stories, a story slam, and workshops. *Denton Civic Center*, 321 E. McKinney St. 940-380-9320; [tejasstorytelling.com](http://tejasstorytelling.com)

**FRISCO**

**Conference USA Men's and Women's Basketball Championships**

March 8-12

The C-USA Basketball Championships feature all 22 games at Ford Center at The Star. The conference champions receive an automatic bid to the NCAA Championship. *Ford Center at The Star*, 9 Cowboys Way. 972-497-4800; [visitfrisco.com](http://visitfrisco.com)

**FRISCO**

**Texas Pinball Festival**

March 25-27

The largest in the industry, the Texas Pinball Festival features more than 400 vintage and new pinball machines as well as classic arcade games set on free play. Vendors, collectors, and hobbyists

from the surrounding area and beyond bring parts, supplies, game room memorabilia, pinballs, and video games for sale. The annual American Heroes raffle offers a chance to win door prizes, including a new pinball machine. Frisco Conference Center, 7600 John Q. Hammons Drive. 214-471-5777; visitfrisco.com

#### GRAND PRAIRIE

##### Dallas Blues Festival

March 5

The annual blues festival features one of the very best lineups in blues music, with performers including Jeter Jones, Ronnie Bell, Pokey Bear, Theodis Ealey, Nellie Tiger, Travis, Calvin Richardson, and Tucka. *Texas Trust CU Theatre at Grand Prairie, 1001 Texas Trust Way. 972-854-5050; texastrustcutheatre.com*

#### GRAND PRAIRIE

##### Festival de la Familia

March 12-13

This festival at Traders Village features entertainment for all ages. *Traders Village, 2602 Mayfield Road. 972-647-2331; tradersvillage.com/grand-prairie*

#### GREENVILLE

##### Swan Lake

March 19

The Russian Ballet Theatre's new production of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's timeless classic, *Swan Lake*, comes to the historic Greenville Municipal Auditorium. Choreographer Nadezhda Kalinina retouches the oldest St. Petersburg version of the ballet and adds her vision. *Greenville Municipal Auditorium, 2821 Washington St. 903-457-3179; showtimeatthegma.com/event*

#### IRVING

##### Texas Steel Guitar Association Jamboree

March 10-13

Hear steel guitarists from around the world play at the annual jamboree. There are also educational seminars and vendors and manufacturers of steel guitars and musical products. *Sheraton DFW Airport Hotel, 4440 W. John Carpenter Freeway. 817-558-3481; texassteelguitar.org*

#### IRVING

##### The Las Colinas Symphony: Mozart con Amore

March 19

Guest conductor Juan Carlos Lomónaco leads guest violinist Madeline Adkins in Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major*.

The orchestra also presents Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture, Op. 62*, Schumann's *Overture, Scherzo and Finale, Op. 52*, and Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony*. *Irving Arts Center, 3333 N. MacArthur Blvd. 972-252-4800; lascolinassymphony.org*

#### LA GRANGE

##### Best Little Cowboy Gathering in Texas

March 10-12

The gathering features Western swing, classic country, and other Texas music. This year's lineup includes country legend T.G. Sheppard on Friday and Grammy winner Rick Treviño on Saturday. There's also dancing in the dance hall and several food booths. *Fayette County Fairgrounds, 400 W. Fair Grounds Road. facebook.com/thebestlittlecowboygatheringintexas*

#### LEWISVILLE

##### St. Paddy's Texas Style

March 12

Toast to St. Patrick's Day and Texas Independence Day with Irish and Texas music, dance, beer, and amusements for kids including jumbo yard games. Food and drinks are sold on-site. Blankets and chairs are encouraged, and well-behaved pets on leashes are welcome. *Wayne Ferguson Plaza, Old Town, 150 W. Church St. 972-219-3401; cityoflewisville.com*

#### LULING

##### Rajun' Cajun Throwdown

March 12

Started as a cookoff with some music and a few vendors, this event has grown into a full-blown Cajun street festival with live zydeco music all day, arts and crafts vendors, food vendors, a beverage garden, crawfish sold by the pound, activities for kids, wiggle races, bungee jumps, petting zoos, and barrel trains. The crawfish races are also a huge hit and a must-see attraction. *Downtown Luling, 421 E. Davis St. 512-738-0228; lulingmainstreet.com*

#### NAVASOTA

##### Texas Birthday Bash

March 4-5

The 10th annual Texas Birthday Bash brings all things Texas to downtown, with a full lineup of entertainment. On Friday, see several musical acts including Jack Ingram and Diamond Rio. Saturday brings Bri Bagwell, Cory Morrow, Pat Green, and the Randy Rogers Band, along with many other acts.

There's also a Kids' Zone that includes a petting zoo and mechanical bull. *Downtown Navasota, 200 McAlpine St. 936-825-6475; texasbirthdaybash.com*

#### PLANO

##### Chips Poker Tournament

March 25

A ticket to the seventh annual Chips Texas Hold 'Em Poker Tournament includes small bites and beverages, and prizes are guaranteed to players who make it to the final table. Proceeds from this last-man-standing poker tournament benefit the Downtown Plano Arts and Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit organization that funds free community programming and arts education. *Rooftop Event Spot, 1000 14th St., Suite 400. 972-922-1292; visitplano.com*

#### RICHARDSON

##### Plano Symphony Orchestra: The Young Artists and Scheherazade

March 19

The Plano Symphony Orchestra hosts the annual Collin County Young Artist Competition. Nearly 100 participants in secondary education compete, and the three winners perform their winning concertos during this concert. *Scheherazade*, a symphonic suite composed by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, is based on *One Thousand and One Nights*. *Eisemann Center, 2351 Performance Drive. 972-473-7262; planosymphony.org*

#### ROUND TOP

##### Spring Antiques Show

March 17-April 3

The Round Top Antiques Show takes place over two weeks and features shopping, a festival, food, and activities in the Texas countryside. *Various locations. 979-505-1200; exploreroundtop.com*

#### ROUND TOP

##### Herb Society of America: Pioneer Unit Plant and Gift Sale

March 18-19

Gardeners and plant lovers are invited to bring their wagons to the Herb Society of America's annual plant sale. Celebrate spring by replacing plants and refreshing beds from the selection of bedding plants, herbs, shrubs, roses, succulents, and trees. *Round Top Festival Institute, 248 Jaster Road. 832-867-9617; herbsocietypioneer.org/events*

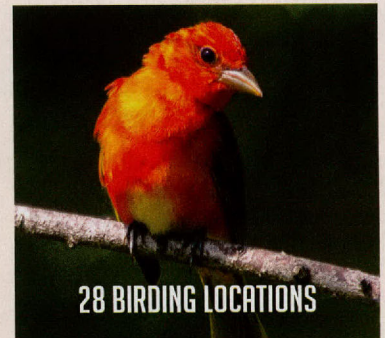
#### SALADO

##### Wildflower Arts and Crafts Fair

March 26-27

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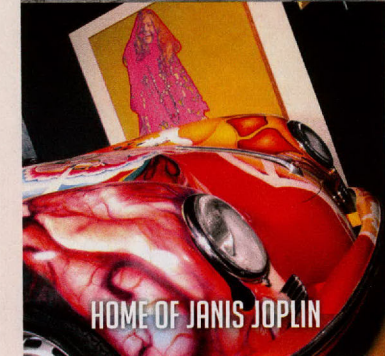
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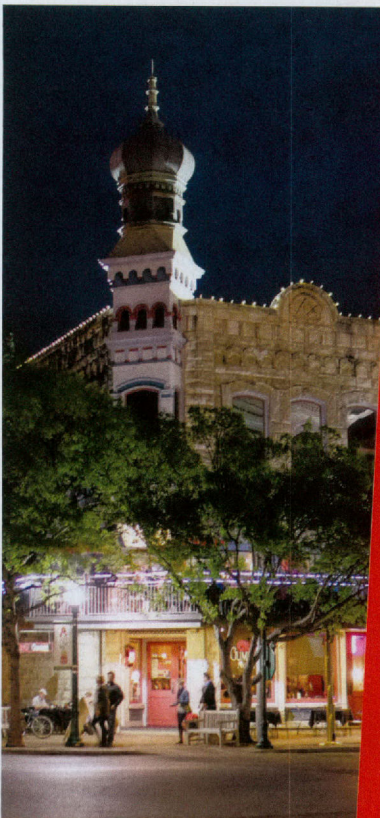
Herb Mignery, *Chackmata*, Bronze, 1988, Gift of Jack and Valerie Guenther and Shannon Michaud



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selling handcrafted items from all over the state, including wood-works, jewelry, original paintings, photography, pottery, toys, soaps, knit and crocheted items, and embroidery. Admission is free. *Salado Civic Center, 601 N. Main St. 254-947-5040; salado.com*

**SALADO**

**Texas Packard Meet**

March 31-April 3

Open to all owners and fans of automobiles built by the Packard Motor Car Company from 1899 to 1958, the 43rd annual Texas Packard Meet includes a swap meet, car show, Packard seminar, awards banquet, and a mixer with live entertainment. *Holiday Inn Express Salado-Belton, 1991 N. Stagecoach Road. 832-905-3904; texaspackardmeet.org*

**SHERMAN**

**Celtic Festival and Highland Games**

March 19-20

The fifth annual Sherman Celtic Festival and Highland Games has Celtic dancing, Viking Village, Scottish clans, cultural exhibitors, and food and beverages. *Pecan Grove Park-West, 3200 Canyon Creek Drive. shermancelticfest.com*

**SHINER**

**Spring Into Quilting Show**

March 11-12

The Shiner Heritage Quilt Guild's biennial show features quilt artistry, a quilt-block challenge, a donation quilt, vendors, the guild boutique, demonstrations, and food and drinks. *First Methodist Church Activity Center, 102 W. Church St. shinerheritagequilters.org*

**TEMPLE**

**Aliento a Tequila**

Through 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 tequilerías 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*

**TEMPLE**

**Family Day: Fiesta Day**

March 5

In conjunction with the newest exhibit, *Aliento a Tequila*, the museum is having a Fiesta Family Day. Learn about Latin American

culture and enjoy fiesta activities. *Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum, 315 W. Avenue B. 254-298-5172; templeparks.com*

#### TEMPLE

##### **Pawz on the Plaza**

March 19  
On National Puppy Day, bring your four-legged friend out for vendors, demonstrations, and pet adoptions. *Santa Fe Plaza, 301 W. Avenue A. 254-298-5690; templeparks.com*

#### TEMPLE

##### **Lonesome Dove**

March 25-June 25  
*Lonesome Dove*, Larry McMurtry's epic novel about two aging Texas Rangers who drive a herd of stolen cattle 2,500 miles from the Rio Grande to Montana, captured the public imagination. The *Lonesome Dove* miniseries, which first aired on CBS in 1989, drew an even wider audience. This exhibition presents 55 framed classic images taken by Bill Wittliff during the show's filming. Wittliff was a renowned photographer and writer, and he was the executive producer (with Suzanne De Passe) of *Lonesome Dove*. *Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum, 315 W. Avenue B. 254-298-5172; templeparks.com*

#### TEMPLE

##### **Healthy Kids Running Series**

March 27-May 1  
The Healthy Kids Running Series is a national, community-based nonprofit that provides a five-week running series for kids ages 2-14. The event is designed for kids to get active and lay the foundation for a healthy lifestyle. Races range from 50 yards to 1 mile based on age group. Participants are awarded a medal and shirt, race bibs for each race, and trophies for winners. *Freedom Park, 8456 Tarver Drive. 254-340-4577; healthykidsrunningseries.org/race-locations/belton-tx*

#### THE COLONY

##### **Luck of the Irish Triathlon**

March 20  
Test your luck and strength competing in your choice of a traditional triathlon or a run-bike-run race. Alternatively, bring some friends along and compete in the relay. Participants receive a commemorative T-shirt, finisher medal, and green drink after the race. *Lewisville ISD Eastside Aquatic Center, 5729 Memorial Drive. 972-306-2000; playtri.com/race-calendar*

#### THE COLONY

##### **Mother and Son Adventure Night**

March 26  
Enjoy quality time filled with adventure in the outdoors. Activities include archery, fishing, and horseshoes. *Lions Club Park, 4800 Nash Drive. 972-625-1106; thecolonytx.gov*

#### TOLAR

##### **Ceramic Expo**

March 18-19  
Shop for ceramic supplies from vendors, compete in judged ceramic art competitions, and even learn a new hobby. *J.D. Neely Community Center, 120 Tolar Cemetery Road. 254-716-5227; westceramicshow.com*

#### VALLEY VIEW

##### **150th Birthday Celebration**

March 26  
The city of Valley View celebrates its 150th birthday with food, music, and community activities like pageants, beard-growing contests, antique tractors, and vendors. *Downtown Valley View Square, 300 W. O'Buch St. 940-726-3740; cityofvv.com/150th-birthday*

#### WACO

##### **Texas Sports Hall of Fame Induction Banquet**

March 12  
At the 61st annual Texas Sports Hall of Fame Induction Banquet, the following athletes and sports figures will be inducted: Bob Beamon, Chris Bosh, Robert Griffin III, Tony Parker, Carly Patterson, Mike Renfro, Suzie Snider Eppers, Michael Strahan, and Stacy Sykora. *BASE at Extraco Event Center, 4401 Bosque Blvd. 254-756-1633; tshof.org/induction-banquet.html*

#### WACO

##### **Texas Food Truck Showdown**

March 19  
Enjoy a beer and wine garden while children can play in the Kids Zone. On average, 40 food trucks from around the country participate, and more than 25,000 people attend. *Heritage Square, 3rd Street and Austin Avenue. 254-757-5600; thetexasfoodtruckshowdown.com*

#### SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **Wendy Red Star: A Scratch on the Earth**

Through May 8  
This midcareer survey showcases the work of the Portland artist. An enrolled member of

the Apsáalooke (Crow) Tribe, Red Star works across disciplines to explore the intersections of Native American ideologies and colonialist structures, both historically and in contemporary society. Drawing on pop culture, conceptual art strategies, and the Crow traditions she was raised with, Red Star pushes photography in new directions—from self-portraiture to photo-collage and mixed media—to showcase her perspective on American history. *San Antonio Museum of Art, 200 W. Jones Ave. 210-978-8100; samuseum.org*

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **Night of Artists**

March 25-26  
This event includes the viewing and sale of nearly 300 new works of painting, sculpture, and mixed media by over 75 of today's leading contemporary Western artists. *The Briscoe Western Art Museum, 210 W. Market St. 210-299-4499; briscoemuseum.org/noa*

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **Fiesta San Antonio**

March 31-April 10  
For 11 days, the city celebrates its history and diversity with a giant party. More than 100 local nonprofit organizations participate in the festivities and raise funds to support the community throughout the year. Festivities include street fairs, parades, carnivals, charity runs, music, arts, culture, and pageants. *Various locations. 210-227-5191; fiestasanantonio.org*

#### WESLACO

##### **Texas Onion Fest**

March 26  
The Texas Onion Fest celebrates the development of the world-famous Texas 1015 Onion in Weslaco by Leonard Pike at the Texas A&M University Extension Service. The festival, which began in 1989, offers diversions for the entire family, with a lineup of entertainment, cooking demos, the 1015 Market, dancing, and a horse show. *Mayor Pablo Peña City Park, 300 N. Airport Drive. 956-968-2102; weslaco.com*

#### DON'T SEE YOUR

**EVENT?** If you think your event might be of interest to *Texas Highways* readers, submit your information at [texashighways.com/submitevent](http://texashighways.com/submitevent)



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## THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5



# Kilgore

*Tall pines and high kicks*

BY CHET GARNER

Kilgore is an authentic Piney Woods town boasting the “World’s Richest Acre,” a collection of oil derricks just off Main Street that memorializes the town’s oil industry. As you continue tripping, you’ll find an entire gusher’s worth of exciting things to do and tasty dishes to sample in this place rich in East Texas culture.

### East Texas Oil Museum

To stand in Kilgore is to stand atop what was once the most productive oil field in the history of the world. This museum takes visitors back to the boom days, which started in 1930 with the discovery of the East Texas oil field. Inside, you’ll find a detailed recreation of an entire main street, complete with a muddy road full of vehicles and mule carts going about their daily business. Animated figures tell their stories as you stroll from building to building and learn about daily life in another era. The theater even smells like popcorn.

### Country Tavern

This restaurant has been filling Texan bellies since the boom days—1939, to be exact. Inside this windowless metal building outside of town, you’ll find some of the best barbecue in Texas. While the brisket and sausage are great, the pork ribs made this spot famous. The tavern serves about 4,000 pounds of sweet, smoky, and sticky ribs each week. These ribs are different from the dry-rubbed ribs Texas is known for, but one bite will make you understand why they’ve been around so long.

### Rangerette Showcase and Museum

It’s hard to imagine sports without sideline entertainment. The tradition began in 1940 when Gussie Nell Davis started the Kilgore Rangerettes, the first precision dance team in the U.S. This museum at Kilgore College is the best place to learn about the Rangerettes’ storied history and how they truly changed the game. One thing they’ve never changed much is their signature uniforms.

### BigHead Creek Mountain Bike Trail

East Texas isn’t known for hills because they’re all hidden by the trees. But underneath the canopy, you’ll find this 3.3-mile loop for single-track mountain biking. This trail follows a sandy creek, sometimes so closely that if you stray merely a foot, you’ll take a 10-foot tumble into the water. The city has also built jumps, berms, ramps, and other obstacles for an extra challenge. I highly recommend the see-saw feature—like riding on a see-saw for bikes.

### Brigitta’s Hungarian Restaurant

Brigitta Gyorfi and her husband, Mike Csabai, bring the flavors of Central Europe to East Texas. Their signature spice, Hungarian paprika, lends every dish a sweet and hot punch. Start your meal with a few cabbage rolls, then move to the authentic “chicken paprikas” consisting of creamy stewed chicken served atop noodles with a dollop of sour cream. You won’t leave “hungary.”

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 Kilgore episode visit [thedaytripper.com](http://thedaytripper.com).  
Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.





# The Soothsayer of Shrubbery

For four decades, Neil Sperry has wielded Texas' greenest of thumbs

By Robert Wilonsky

“I am just an average gardener,” says Neil Sperry, the McKinney resident who’s anything but average to generations of Texans who won’t plant, prune, or pick until he says it’s time. An accidental broadcaster and bestselling author, Sperry is Texas’ guru of greenery thanks to his syndicated *Plant Talk Texas* radio show carried daily by more than 30 stations across the state.

Even if you’ve never pressed seed into soil, you’ve likely heard Sperry’s name or voice, so ubiquitous is the man who maintains he is just “blessed to have made my career writing and talking about my favorite hobby.”

For 40 years, *Neil Sperry’s Complete Guide to Texas Gardening* has been a must-have resource for amateurs and experts alike. If you want to know

**“Everything [in my yard] is a shade-tolerant ground cover or ferns or shrubs, and it’s still a very handsome landscape—once people could be happy with unless they planned to play croquet.”**

what to plant—and where, when, and how—this is the guide to which Texans turn. It even has a nickname, “The Boot Book,” in reference to the floral-themed boots on its cover.

Sperry says his original book has sold more than 1 million copies, but issues involving the original publisher and an unauthorized e-version of the *Complete Guide* prompted Sperry to self-publish another book, *Neil Sperry’s Lone Star Gardening*, only sold on his website and now in its fifth printing. “I can make the decisions,” Sperry says about branching out on his own. “Whether they are right or wrong, they are mine. I can stand up for them.”

Sperry was born in College Station, where his father was a range management professor at Texas A&M University. By his teens, Neil was running a nursery

and landscaping business. In the late 1960s, he became a teacher—first at a high school in Ohio after studying horticulture at Ohio State University; then as part of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension from 1970–1977.

Sperry first got involved in media in 1970, when he appeared on WFAA-Channel 8's farm-and-ranch program; he also appeared on WBAP-Channel 5, where he learned the broadcasting trade from such local titans as anchor Chip Moody. In January 1978, after he left the AgriLife Extension, Sperry debuted on WFAA-AM radio. Syndicated newspaper columns and radio shows followed, leading to his induction in the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in 2003.

All along, Sperry has been as essential to Texas gardening as the sun and the rain.

**TH:** *You had no previous journalism experience when you first got on the air. What were you most nervous about?*

**NS:** I was nervous twice. The first week I went on the air in Dallas, I was worried about what kinds of questions people would ask. And when I took the live statewide radio program, I worried, "What will I be asked about parts of Texas I don't know?" I didn't know about Amarillo or the Valley and how accurate or valid my information would be. But people are grateful as long as you can say, "I don't know." The best thing you can say is, "Tell me what else is happening, and we can come up with an answer together." What's important is giving a decent answer. Doctors say the same thing.

**TH:** *I assume that's the real fun of the job, in some way you're always learning, always searching, always being surprised by something.*

**NS:** Absolutely. It's also fun to have somebody call about a plant nobody else knows. A plant like stapelia. I love that plant, which is also called the "dead mule cactus." Why? Because the thing smells like a dead mule. It's pollinated by flies. I used to collect them. You would recognize the plant and the flower, which looks like a giant hairy starfish. When somebody calls and asks about that, I can go into

great detail about that, and then they're like, "Good lord, where did that come from?" It's fun. I love the hobby and this profession, and I've only tried to get better at it.

**TH:** *Where do you stand on herbicides given your dad's work at A&M and your own experiences?*

**NS:** I try to be middle of the road. There are extremists out there who are too organic, and there are people who want you out there spraying everything. But I watched my dad do research on herbicides for 25 years, and for the time I was growing up I helped him with that research; then I worked at A&M and relied on their research. Those who make a mockery of valid university research, I have no use for.

**TH:** *What's the No. 1 question you're asked?*

**NS:** "How can I get grass to grow in the shade?" It's usually accompanied by, "The homeowners' association is saying I have to have grass and can't have ground cover." That is the fallacy of the HOA.

**TH:** *How do you respond?*

**NS:** I try to be decent. I explain to them St. Augustine is the most shade-tolerant grass. That part is standard. I try to convince them—and some are harder to convince than others—that shade is not a disaster. It's an opportunity to do a different landscape. We've lived in our house 45 years, and ours has evolved from Bermuda to St. Augustine to no turf grass. Everything is a shade-tolerant ground cover or ferns or shrubs, and it's still a very handsome landscape—one people could be happy with unless they planned to play croquet.

**TH:** *Well, I mean, what's good enough for Neil Sperry should be more than good enough for the rest of us.*

**NS:** We live in a rural area down a hill. Our landscape is behind our house, which is obscured from view. Pages 98 and 141 in [Neil Sperry's *Lone Star Gardening*] are from our backyard, and I show photos

of our yard in my newsletter frequently and tell people this is what we see out our back windows. The problem we have where we live is feral hogs. I've thrown up a wide fence to keep them off. It's a challenge. I also have to admit something: I am not 35 years old anymore, and I have vertigo, and bending down puts me into a tailspin. That part of gardening has become hard for me.

**TH:** *Is that frustrating for you?*

**NS:** Most people face that at some point. You have to learn to be patient with yourself and scale things back, to bring it closer to home. I've learned to do that. It's frustrating at times, but I've learned what's important to me. The most satisfying part of my life has been my family. I love my career. But your life changes as you get some years under your belt. You have to be patient with your life. I am grateful I am here.

**TH:** *When did you realize you were no longer a landscaper, and, in fact, were becoming a celebrity for knowing how to make things grow?*

**NS:** I don't look at myself that way. When I am in McKinney people say, "You're Lynn's husband" because of my wife's time on the McKinney Independent School District board. [She has been a trustee for more than 30 years.] "Lynn's husband"—that's how I like to be recognized. She founded the McKinney Education Foundation. She's the reason there's the Sperry Performing Arts Center at McKinney High School. I'm just flattered anyone cares. 🐾

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Visit Neil Sperry's website for gardening tips along with information on his gardening books, radio shows, e-newsletter, and podcast. [neilsperry.com](http://neilsperry.com)

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

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

# VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



## 'Texas Bluebonnets'

1927

**E**verett Gee Jackson didn't plan to become an artist. Born in Mexia in 1900, Jackson enrolled at Texas A&M University in 1918 to study architecture. A professor recognized his artistic talent and urged him to become a painter, prompting Jackson to attend the Art Institute of Chicago. Jackson originally embraced impressionism, the popular style of the day, but on a 1923 trip to Mexico he befriended modernist muralists including Diego Rivera, who influenced Jackson's approach. Back in Texas in 1927, Jackson painted *Texas Bluebonnets* for a Houston contest. The judges dismissed the piece's modernist interpretation of the state flower, fellow artist Katherine Morrison Kahle told the *San Diego Sun* newspaper in 1934. Nevertheless, a crowd gathered to see the painting when it was displayed in Houston. Jackson moved to California in 1928 and began teaching art at San Diego State University. He retired in 1964 and continued painting almost until his death in San Diego in 1995. 🐾

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Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to [tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com](mailto:tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com).



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