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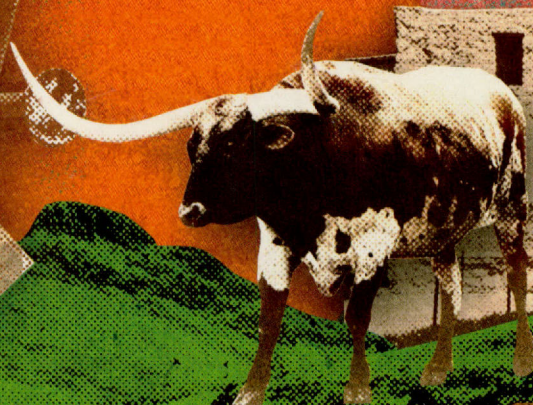
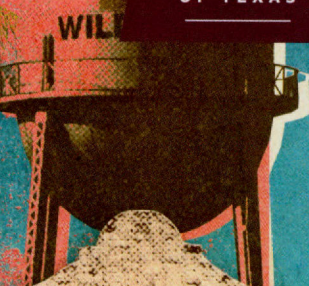
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EDITOR'S
NOTE



On the Road Again

After a year of staying close to home, many of our writers got back on the highway for the first time to report the stories for our annual Road Trip Issue. Clayton Maxwell, who has been writing for us for seven years and was recently promoted to senior writer, decided to go big for her first Texas road trip in 11 months and clocked in 1,900 miles on her sojourn from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande Valley. Her first day on the road happened to be her birthday, and she was treated to a celebratory drink at the Cattle Exchange restaurant in Canadian. (Her recommendation if you go? “Steak, steak, steak.”)

The small-town hospitality continued the next morning when she stopped in for coffee at The Canadian Restaurant. “Our waitress in her trucker hat was a warm greeter clearly proud of the pancakes here and of Canadian in general,” Maxwell said. “She was generous in her descriptions of what makes her town special, like the ranchers who come in for breakfast every day. It’s these unexpected friendly connections that allow us a glimpse into the soul of a place and open up our hearts a little—the best part of travel.”

Our newest writer-at-large, Roberto José Andrade Franco, made some discoveries of his own on his inaugural visits to the Alamo and Fort Worth Stockyards. Though he’s lived in the state for most of his life, he’d never visited either location, partly because of their distance from his hometown of El Paso. Though he enjoyed his time at the iconic landmarks, his favorite place in Texas is still Southwest University Park, home of the El Paso Chihuahuas. “Few things are as relaxing as watching minor league baseball in the summer,” Franco said. “That stadium is where I’ve had some of my most enjoyable evenings with my wife or friends and family members.”

Whether you’re setting out to revisit your favorite spots or discover something new, we hope this summer’s road trips are your most rewarding yet.

Emily Roberts Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EDITOR IN CHIEF



The Double Play

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Quintessentially Texan

To learn what it means to be "Texan," one writer visits two major tourist sites to gain perspective beyond the legends.

By Roberto José Andrade Franco

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The Ties That Bind

A road trip from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande Valley reveals the Texas spirit.

*By Clayton Maxwell
Photographs by Kenny Braun*

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I Do Love Me Some Buc-ee's

Explore the sights, smells, and snacks at the state's most beloved convenience store chain.

*By Michael J. Mooney
Photographs by Dave Shafer*



DOWNTOWN
Brownsville is steeped in South Texas history.

BEAUMONT

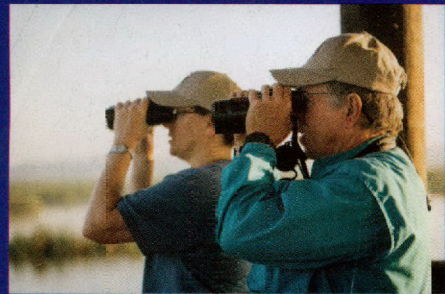
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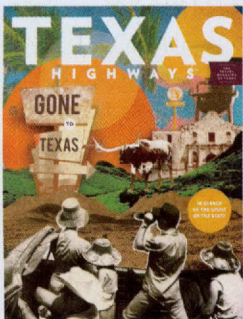
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ON THE COVER

Illustration by Peter Horvath

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Behind the Story



Michael J. Mooney was no stranger to Buc-ee's before writing "I Do Love Me Some Buc-ee's" (Page 56). "I think the first time I encountered it was seeing the billboards," the Dallas-based writer says. "Anything that is advertising something dozens of miles away, I have a very difficult time skipping those. It seemed like an old-timey thing that you'd see on cross-country road trips." Though the chain started in the 1980s, many aspects of the stores, from the extensive soda fountain options to the buckets of cotton candy, strike Mooney as charmingly dated. "They definitely latch on to that nostalgic feel." Over the years, he's visited six or seven locations of the convenience store, but he chose to spotlight the one in the North Texas town of Denton. "It's not just people stopping for gas," he says. "Everybody is on their own adventure, and they just happen to cross paths in this one place."

Featured Contributors



Paul Kix

Kix formed a strong bond with Dallas as a *Dallas Observer* reporter in the 2000s. In his essay "Taken for a Ride" (Page 14), he explores how his 1988 Cadillac transported him into adulthood. "It's been amazing to see Dallas mature in the last two decades into a thriving, international, cosmopolitan city," the now Connecticut-based writer says. Kix's work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *GQ*, *ESPN*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. His first book, a biography titled *The Saboteur*, was a bestseller on Amazon and optioned by DreamWorks. He is currently at work on a second book about the civil rights movement.



MM Pack

The Texas Gulf Coast writer has followed the progress of Barton Springs Mill and the renaissance of Texas heritage grains ("Grain Expectations," Page 72) since hearing proprietor James Brown speak at an event in 2018. "During COVID confinement, I joined the ranks of pandemic bakers, and I ordered BSM products online," Pack says. "They changed my whole relationship to baking as I learned how various flours can have such different flavors and characteristics." Pack, a fifth-generation Texan, writes about food and food history and has contributed to *The Austin Chronicle*, *Edible Austin*, and several anthologies.

Photos: Dave Shafer (top), Beowulf Sheehan (middle)

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Emily Roberts Stone

Deputy Editor
Michael Hoinski

Senior Managing Editor
Matt Joyce

Managing Editor
Kimya Kavehkar

Assistant Editor
Julia Jones

Senior Writer
Clayton Maxwell

Writers-at-Large
Roberto José Andrade Franco,
Joe Nick Patoski

Contributing Editors
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Contributing Writers
Chet Garner, Michael Hardy, Paul Kix,
Pam LeBlanc, John Nova Lomax,
John Lumpkin, Michael J. Mooney,
Amanda Ogle, MM Pack,
Michael Scott Rodríguez

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Product and Engagement Manager
Natalie Moore

Digital Strategies Manager
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Web Editor
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@texashighways.com or Texas Highways,
P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009

PUBLISHER
Andrea Lin

ART
Creative Director
Mark Mahorsky

Art Director
Ashley Burch

Associate Art Director
Chris Linnen

Photo Editor
Brandon Jakobeit

Contributing Photographers
Kenny Braun, Sean Fitzgerald,
Melanie Grizzel, Tiffany Hofeldt,
Tom McCarthy Jr., Eric W. Pohl, Dave Shafer

Production Coordinator
Raquel V. Sanchez

MARKETING & BUSINESS
Associate Publisher
Sabrina Ballesteros

E-Commerce Marketing Coordinator
Allison Douglas

Strategic Partnerships Manager
Lois M. Rodriguez

Ancillary Publications Manager
Julie Stratton

Business Manager
Karen Garza

Ancillary Publications Coordinator
LaKena Cooks

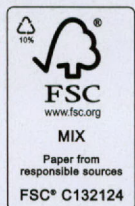
Accounts Receivable
Ana Perez

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MERGE



No one has to tell me how spending time outdoors strengthens your soul. Just go sit by a river or stream under shade trees and you just know it's a good thing.

Janet Joyce Keel Butler, Kerrville

Buried Treasure

I love metal detecting when I have time ["Texas Marks the Spot," April]. Just remember to get permission, fill your holes, haul out the trash, and obey state and local laws regarding what you can dig up/keep.

@roscoeshark

Willow House

This place is awesome ["Little Boxes on the Hillside," April]. Our group of 13 had the best time and met new friends. Definitely recommend!

@stephtowez

Arnosky Family Farms

We love to get garden plants here ["From Gloom to Bloom," March].

They must use magic because their plants always grow great!

Chaundel Johnson, San Marcos

Happy Camper

Thanks for finally taking note of our RVers ["Intro to Campology," April]. Our younger generation has rediscovered this form of recreation and how satisfying it is for young families. Us older folks have known about this for generations. Too many non-RVers envision taking long extended trips, but those of us who own them understand how enjoyable weekend jaunts with our families are. Our wonderful state offers more to see and do than most countries, and there are hundreds of campgrounds, from Corps of Engineers sites to our amazing state park system to commercial campgrounds. My idea of "fine dining" is being with my family with burgers or dogs on the grill at the lake or park.

Phillip H. Wood, Waxahachie

Home on the Range

Your description of the Hill Country was perfect ["Feel Right at Home," April]. I love it. We have a place on the same land my grandparents ranched 90 years ago. It

is exactly as you described it. Everything sticks or bites, and the grass burrs are never ending. Our house sits at about the same elevation as Dancer Peak. We are fortunate to have an unobstructed view south, towards Smoothing Iron Mountain.

Harold Simpson, Field Creek

Odds and Wends

My first mother-in-law, Gertrude Shelton, was born on a Wendish farm between Giddings and La Grange ["Wendish Delight," March]. One major difference [between Mrs. Shelton's coffeecake and writer Lisa Bubert's] is that Shelton's recipe has raisins and Bubert's does not. Mrs. Shelton's coffeecake had so few raisins that you could never tell when you would get a bite containing one. I asked her to add enough raisins that we could get at least one in every bite. She did this and, ever after, when we would go to a family or Wendish gathering, hers would be the first coffeecake to disappear.

Bill Hanley, Houston

Life Lessons

When we were growing up, my mother talked about how she had dated a man in the late 1920s who rode a motorcycle ["The Wind Between Us," February]. He also chewed tobacco. On what became their last date, he combined his two passions. He had to spit, and she got it in the face. My siblings and I never developed an interest in chewing tobacco or riding motorcycles.

Herb Nordmeyer, Castroville

People vs. Places

I have been a subscriber for well over a quarter century. I have saved many articles and used them as guides to travel all across this great state. However, your magazine content has recently shifted from *Texas Highways* to *Texas Personal Experiences and Opinions*. Please get back to articles of destinations for us to discover on Texas highways.

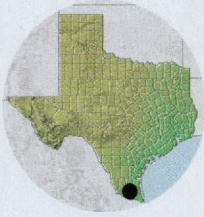
John Downs, Sadler

A Refreshing Oasis

Photographer Kenny Braun has been visiting Krause Springs, a family-owned swimming hole and camping area, for more than 25 years. Located west of Austin in the Hill Country community of Spicewood, the property's springs feed a constructed swimming pool and a natural swimming hole on Little Cypress Creek. Braun used a slow shutter speed to capture the water's movement, which meant he had to wait for the swimmer to hold still for a moment so her image wouldn't be blurred. "There was something primal about the girl under the waterfall that illustrated the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature," Braun says. Krause Springs offers reservations for RV sites, while day use and tent camping are first come, first served. Day use entry costs \$9 for visitors ages 12 and older; \$5 for children ages 4-11.







San Benito

Rogelio Nuñez forges a sense of place by preserving local culture and identity

By Michael Rodriguez



ROGELIO NUÑEZ still walks the barrio he grew up in, which includes the 1920s hall of *Leñadores del Mundo* (Woodmen of the World), a fraternal group his grandfather was a part of.

To understand why Rogelio Nuñez says the world revolves around San Benito, you have to understand his commitment to his hometown's cultural identity. Nuñez grew up in this deep corner of South Texas and fondly recalls his barrio's barbershops, meat markets, *panaderías*, and theaters—all found within a 12-block radius, near the city's freshwater resaca. Situated on land that was part of a Spanish grant, San Benito developed in the early 20th century as a railroad and agricultural center. After moving away to Kingsville and Austin for college, Nuñez returned and took an active role in supporting San Benito's Mexican American community. He helped pave the way for a local cultural renaissance as the founder of the nonprofit Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center—named for the famed local conjunto accordionist—which promotes Mexican American arts. He's also the director of the nonprofit Casa de Proyecto Libertad, which provides legal services to immigrants. "My wife thinks I'm nuts because I still go by the area and the house where I grew up every day," Nuñez says. "It gives me a sense of being."

Neighborhood Spirit

"I was raised in what's called Mexiquito, or the old Mexican side of town, and I walked to school every day alone. Family lived in the neighborhood. I'd travel half a block to my grandparents' house to get a bite to eat and hang out. Thursday night was bingo night, so my mom would take me to see a movie and play bingo. Walking around the neighborhood was always nice. Older folks would say, 'Buenas tardes,' and the younger folks would say, 'How are you doing?'"

Musical Legacy

"My concept of San Benito being the 'center of the universe' comes from an Intro to Sociology course I taught at University of Texas at Brownsville [now UT Rio Grande Valley]. That's where I'd say I was from. San Benito has a lot of things to offer. Bobby Morrow is from San Benito. He won three gold medals as a sprinter in the 1956 Olympics at Melbourne. It's the home of La Villita Dance Hall and Narciso Martínez. Freddy Fender, whose original name was Baldemar Huerta, is also from San Benito."

Cultural Center

"We started the Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center, and the whole idea of the 'center of the universe' became more important because people would come from all over the world. The center began to flourish. The Valley did not have a cultural center for Chicanos, and so this became the place. By Oct. 29, 2021, we'll be coming to 30 years of cultural programming. A few years ago, we moved the conjunto festival to Los Fresnos, 10 miles away, and

COVID has affected us a lot. We still do presentations at La Villita in San Benito, and my church, Getsemani, allows us to do readings and poetry in its nice acoustics."

Bound by Bread

"Cultural issues are economic engines for our community. Fernando Sanchez didn't know what La Villita would become when he and his wife, Eva, built it in the 1940s. All he knew was that people needed a place to dance. Now it's thought of as one of the most famous dance halls around, where Narciso Martínez and Freddy Fender performed. And La Especial Bakery is still there, right down the street from La Villita. Even younger folks in San Benito identify with the bakery because it's a place people talk about and find just by following the smell of bread."

Honor Your Roots

"When I was teaching, my students didn't have a sense of place, of community. They came from somewhere but weren't told who they were and why. I always tell people that one of the best sources of information is your family, and to ask them what their world was. Chicanos are a pueblo, a people. This is our homeland, and how to arrive at the liberation of my people comes through different avenues—arts, education, politics. I tried to achieve a cultural infusion here in San Benito using that insight. I think every town needs a major cultural infusion and will benefit from it." 📌



TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

24,371



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

25



YEAR FOUNDED:

1904



NEAREST CITY:

Harlingen, 6 miles north



MARQUEE EVENT:

Resacafest, typically held on the Saturday nearest July 4, is San Benito's annual Independence Day celebration at W.H. Heavin Memorial Park along the resaca.



MAP IT:

La Villita Dance Hall, 261 W. Robertson St.



Taken for a Ride

A former Dallasite reminisces about finding love in the flourishing city from behind the long hood of his '88 Cadillac

By Paul Kix



I came from the west, in search of a place that felt like home. I was a highwayman, putting distance between myself and Phoenix with each sun-bleached mile. I'd spent the first eight months of my professional career in Arizona working for an alt-weekly newspaper, *Phoenix New Times*, writing stories I loved in a place I'd grown to hate. Too hot, too unceasingly scorched. In the long year

of 2003, Phoenix revealed itself to me as the parched brown landscape of death. I missed the four seasons of my Midwestern youth, the verdant green of spring and summer, even as I knew I didn't want to return to the worn familiarity of my Iowa childhood. I wanted to see other parts of the U.S. and live in places more inviting than the one I was fleeing.

So, I moved to Dallas. (Yes, I know: still hot.)

It was just me and my 20-foot U-Haul van and the 1988 Cadillac I'd hitched behind it. The Caddy was massive, the Brougham d'Elegance line, the last full-size model Cadillac made. Altogether I had 40 feet of vehicle behind me, way too much for a 23-year-old kid. I'd asked the guy at the U-Haul rental shop in Phoenix if I would need a special permit or something to put that much hussin' metal on the road.

He'd laughed. I wasn't joking, not exactly.

It wasn't until I reached the point on Interstate 10 where it intersects with Interstate 20 and I moved northeast toward Odessa—about 170 miles east of El Paso and 600 miles into my trip—that I learned how to drive my cargo. The side mirrors' blind spots were in fact massive voids that concealed from view even midsize cars. Better to stay in the free-way's far-right lane. Better to accelerate slowly, too, so I didn't drag the Caddy's bumper against the road. All this infuriated the drivers around me, none more than the ones I encountered three days into my trek in the city I'd hoped would feel like home.

I hit Dallas at rush hour.

Two decades later and well into middle age, my wandering through the desert to Dallas at peak traffic seems almost comical. I tell the story to my kids to lighten their moods, but it did not feel light in the moment.

It felt terrible. Horns blasting, vehicles darting and weaving to my right, my left, up ahead, me signaling from Interstate 30 onto Central Expressway, no one giving an inch in downtown Dallas, screaming, swearing, but somehow making it onto the highway and then somehow getting off it at Mockingbird Lane, only to navigate the equally treacherous and more confusing surface streets of East Dallas, my printed-out MapQuest directions my only guide until, at last, panting, I found my apartment complex on Live Oak Street.

Some of my colleagues at my new employer, the alt-weekly *Dallas*

Observer, had offered to help me unpack, and while I appreciated the extra hands that night, I was most concerned with what remained outside the apartment, on the street: my Caddy.

My lifeblood.

I'd bought it for 3,500 bucks from the aging son of a recently deceased little old lady in Des Moines the summer before my senior year at Iowa State. She had mostly just driven it to church and back. The 15-year-old Caddy had only 40,000 miles. I smiled as I drove it back to campus. It was, above all, a gag purchase—a car so anachronistic to a college setting and the early digital age that its huge berth and long hood, stretching way out before me, became the ultimate ironic statement. At a public university, it is hard to be known for anything unless you are the quarterback

of the football team. For a not insubstantial number of people, though, I became the guy who drove the '88 Caddy.

I drove it after graduation to an internship in New York, and from there back across the country to that first job in Phoenix. By the time I drove to Dallas, my Caddy was no longer my inside joke. I loved it openly, earnestly. The leather upholstery felt like a comfortable couch, the suspension still absorbed every bump. The truth was I'd never been in a car as luxurious. The Caddy had eased not only each voyage but also my trek from youth to young adulthood. It was my one constant, my one friend.

I wanted Dallas to feel as warm and inviting as the interior of the Caddy.

I drove it everywhere. I had to. Reporting in-depth stories for the *Observer* meant meeting lots of people. Phone

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interviews wouldn't get me what I needed. I met proper white ladies in Highland Park and Black men in dashikis in South Dallas. I'd park and the response was always the same: *Now that's a nice car.* The Caddy was my icebreaker. I drove it to see up-and-coming bands in Deep Ellum and Willie Nelson at Fair Park. I drove it to the moneyed high-rises of Turtle Creek, where I sipped Scotch whiskies with corporate lawyers, and then drove it back to East Dallas to indulge in the kind stuff with marginally employed bohemians. I saw a city mature before my eyes in the Caddy: developers refurbishing abandoned hotels downtown, and artisans and small business owners building new shops in Oak Cliff. The vibe was funky and so much fun.

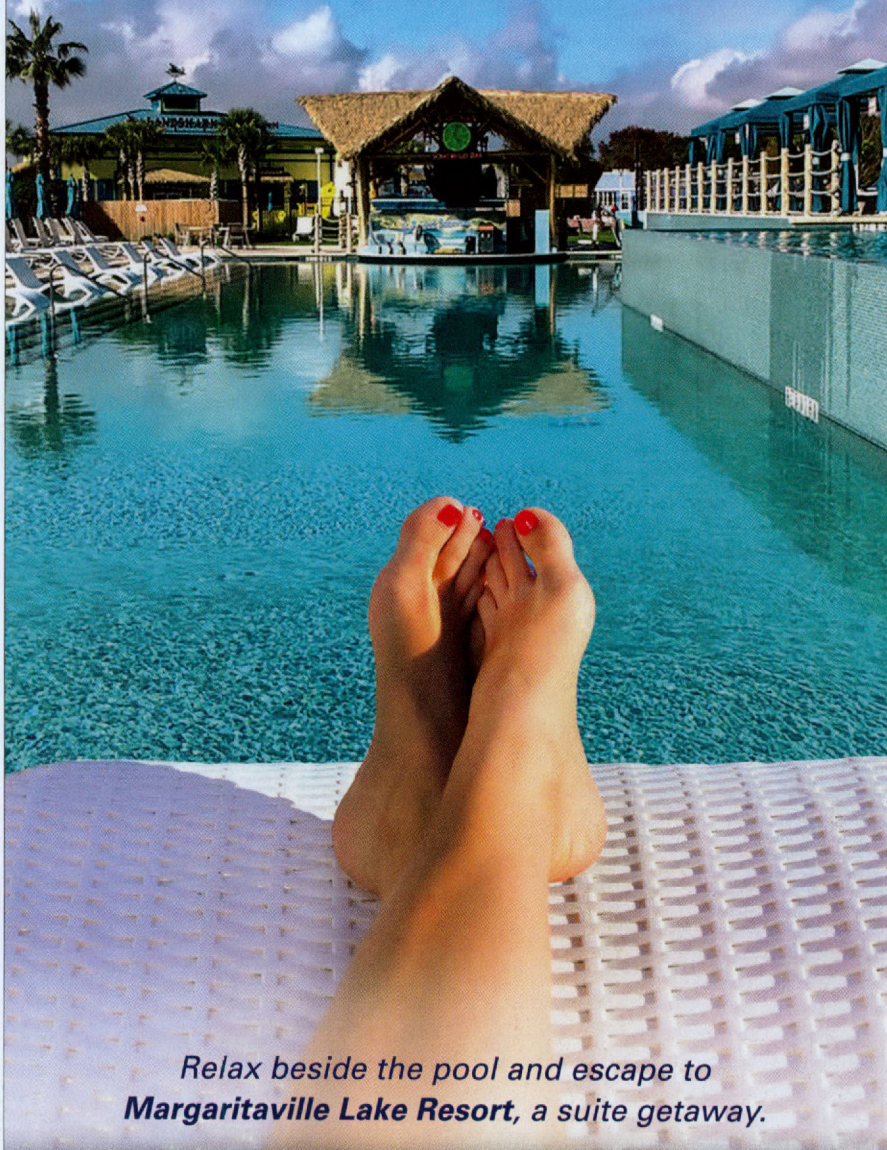
The Caddy showed me Dallas' ugliness, too. A white guy—a then-employee in the city's water and utilities department—once hopped in the car, riding shotgun, and as he pointed out the particulars of his work, he also repeatedly, and cavalierly, dropped the N-word. I was too shocked to raise anything above a mild

At a public university, it is hard to be known for anything unless you are the quarterback of the football team. For a not insubstantial number of people, though, I became the guy who drove the '88 Caddy.

RELAX

A MILE IN OUR SHOES

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objection. I'm still ashamed I didn't kick him out on the spot. I covered cops and courts a bit in those days, when Dallas was the crime capital of the U.S.—most of it the result of feuds over drugs that rushed up Interstate 35 from cartels in Mexico. I'd parked the Caddy before enough yellow-taped crime scenes to know I didn't want to be a crime reporter forever.

Dallas was an education in that way, a city perpetually teaching itself what it wanted to be just as it instructed me in who I might become. The biggest lesson started on the night the Caddy and I fought the North Tollway rush hour to find a wine bar in suburban Addison. It was a meet-and-greet happy hour for the media, and the first person I saw was a gorgeous Black woman with glasses drooping down her nose. We glanced

at each other just long enough to eventually work our way to a corner of the packed room.

Her name was Sonya, she said over the din. She was also a writer. Among other projects, she wrote the nightlife column for the *Observer*, "The Guest List." I wanted something terrible to impress her, so I trotted out the line that had worked everywhere else in Dallas.

"I drive an '88 Cadillac."
Her eyes, those beautiful eyes, went wide. "You *do*?!"
"Yeah."
"Nooooo."
"Yes! It's outside, if you want to see it."
We walked outside, and then Sonya walked a circle around the beast, all 20 glorious feet of it.
"Wowwwww."

She was seven years older than me and originally from Houston, specifically the Fifth Ward neighborhood that produced the rap group Geto Boys. Our differences in age, race, and experience only drew us closer.

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We became inseparable. I mean that quite literally. I began spending so much time at Sonya's downtown studio loft that one month the electricity bill for my own apartment back in East Dallas totaled 33 cents. She was seven years older than me and originally from Houston, specifically the Fifth Ward neighborhood that produced the rap group Geto Boys. Our differences in age, race, and experience only drew us closer. We had that much more to learn about each other.

Sonya is a former model who'd worked at Neiman's after graduating from UT. She took me to fashion shows at the FIG, near the Dallas Museum of Art, to see the beautiful people. We went to gay bars on Cedar Springs Road with her best friend, Brian. We ate, with her connections, at restaurants whose long waitlists didn't apply to us.

Sonya's studio was one-and-a-half blocks from my office, which meant I increasingly left the Caddy for the night in the *Observer's* outdoor parking lot. It was there when I needed it, though I needed it less and less. A few months into our relationship, Sonya wanted to take me to meet her family in Houston. It'd be a weekend trip, and we both knew what it signified: Her mom and dad had never met any of her past boyfriends. I offered to drive the Caddy, but the beast guzzled gas at a surreal clip; I burned half a tank driving to Fort Worth and back. Sonya said we should take her Honda Accord instead.

When we got back to Dallas Sunday night, we stopped by the *Observer* to pick up the Caddy.

I didn't see it.

Had I forgotten I'd parked it somewhere else, maybe in one of the free street-side spots along the block?

Nope.

I turned to Sonya; we both knew. I got out of her car and walked into the paper's parking lot. I saw broken glass where the Caddy had been. The whole crime came to me: the car thief circling the lot, one night, maybe two, maybe more, noticing how nobody came out of the office to claim the car and how no guard stood



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watch over the lot. From there the job was easy: busting open the driver-side window, unlocking the door, hot-wiring the engine, using the key fob I kept attached to the driver-side sun visor to lift the white barricade at the lot's exit, which served as the Caddy's only protection from thieves.

Sonya came over to hug me, but it was no use. I shook with rage.

We filed a police report that night over the phone. I begged the officer to find the Caddy, to return it to me, and unharmed. It was magical thinking.

I failed to stay calm as I spoke, realizing the odds were not in my favor. Dallas had a lot of desperate people—drug users short on cash, lost souls short on sense. I'd written about them. They would do most anything in the law or outside it to get by, get money.

A few days later I got a call from the Dallas Police Department.

They'd found the Caddy.

I'll never forget the drive. I rode shotgun in a pickup, past acres upon acres of commandeered and battered vehicles, in a massive lot the city owned in the far reaches of West Dallas. The guy with the potbelly who worked at the lot remained quiet, perhaps out of respect but more likely out of boredom. He chauffeured a lot of people to the recovered cars that ended up here. The grounds extended beyond a hill, a bend, reaching into distant treelines, and everywhere were cars and trucks and SUVs, some smashed something good and others barely damaged. It felt like we drove for miles.

At last, he slowed and pointed 30 feet ahead of him.

"There," he said.

The Caddy's front tires were flat, and all four rims were gone. The car thief, or thieves, had ripped the ornament off the hood. They'd banged the Caddy's body like it'd placed runner-up in a demolition derby. They'd stripped the hood of its vinyl finish. They'd stripped the interior of any copper—copper being big on the black market. And, as if they were furious

at them, they'd sliced up and ripped out fragments of the leather seats.

My car had been desecrated. It didn't even look like my car.

I walked to the pickup and refused to turn around. If I turned around, I'd sob. It was only when we approached the lot's

office that I realized, for all my attempts at stoicism, I was gasping for breath.

Sonya came with me that day. She'd waited in the office, and when I'd returned from the lot, she took one look

at me and knew what shape the Caddy was in. She quickly got us out of there and back to her car.

Once we closed the doors to her Honda, she turned to me.

"Oh, Paul."

We hugged, and I fought back tears.

I loved her. We had started to try out the L-word, its dimensions, the comfort of its implications. That afternoon in her car, holding Sonya closer still, letting the tears that welled in my eyes drip onto my cheeks, and then hers, I understood something. I understood the moment's significance even as I lived it, an insight that would last well beyond the hug.

The Caddy had served its purpose.

It had been the symbol of my youth and bachelorhood, and as much as I'd loved it, I loved Sonya, whom it had led me to, even more. The Caddy could not

The Caddy had served its purpose. It had been the symbol of my youth and bachelorhood, and as much as I'd loved it, I loved Sonya, whom it had led me to, even more.



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take up space in my new life with her. For all the journeys we'd been on, its final destination had to be here.

My life with Sonya felt as warm and inviting as the interior of the Caddy, and my life in Dallas acquired a similar glow and hearth. I loved the way the city could surprise you. A few months after the Caddy was stolen, Sonya and I voted for a gay Hispanic woman, Lupe Valdez, to be sheriff. Not only did she win, but nobody thought her winning was a big deal. Dallas was expanding into something truly cosmopolitan, international even. Cranes began to dot the skyline, promising more office towers and luxury condos, more downtown foot traffic, more shops and live music, more vibrancy.

The city had so much to love already. I loved the afternoons on the patio of The Old Monk—how the first sip of a cocktail at happy hour softened the day and eased it into night, as my colleagues and I looked out on a shaded Henderson Avenue. I loved the back nine of Cedar Crest on a Sunday morning, hitting a tee shot on a par 3 right into the Dallas skyline, and listening for gospel music

My life with Sonya felt as warm and inviting as the interior of the Caddy, and my life in Dallas acquired a similar glow and hearth. I loved the way the city could surprise you.



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wafting above the course from the nearby South Dallas churches. I loved the food: as many cuisines for the taking as my summer in New York, but cheaper, and better.

Fourteen months after the Caddy was stolen in Dallas, I showed the city just how much I loved it: Sonya and I got married there. We exchanged vows in our friends' backyard in Oak Lawn, a United Church of Christ pastor whose church I attended officiating the ceremony, a chef whose Italian restaurant we loved serving our families. Two hundred of our friends came to the reception the following night, every one of them fellow Dallasites.

We began to imagine a future in Dallas as we honeymooned on Cape Cod. While there, we heard from one of Sonya's friends in Boston about a job opening at a local magazine. I knew I had a good life in Dallas, maybe the best life, but my wanderlust and ambition led me to apply.

Four months later, Sonya and I moved to Boston. Sonya, forever a Texan, cried as we crossed the border into Arkansas. I was not much better to comfort her.

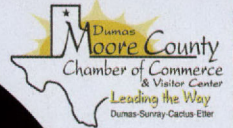
We live in Connecticut now, with our three kids and Sonya's mother, who drove up from Houston after divorcing Sonya's dad and retiring. We have a good life, maybe even a great life, on a shaded street in a quiet suburb. But it's not what we had in Texas. When I published my first book a few years ago, the promotional tour kicked off in Dallas. We held a reading at The Wild Detectives bookstore in Oak Cliff. The neighborhood amazed us: coffee shops, boutique restaurants, and funky artisan storefronts, everything walkable, everything fulfilling the potential of a decade earlier.

The whole of the city was like that: dense, diverse, developed. Dallas had matured alongside Sonya and me. It was wonderful and wistful. A decade and a half had passed and within it a whole lifetime of experience. But seeing old friends in familiar haunts, and some new ones, still felt inviting.

It still felt like home. 🌵

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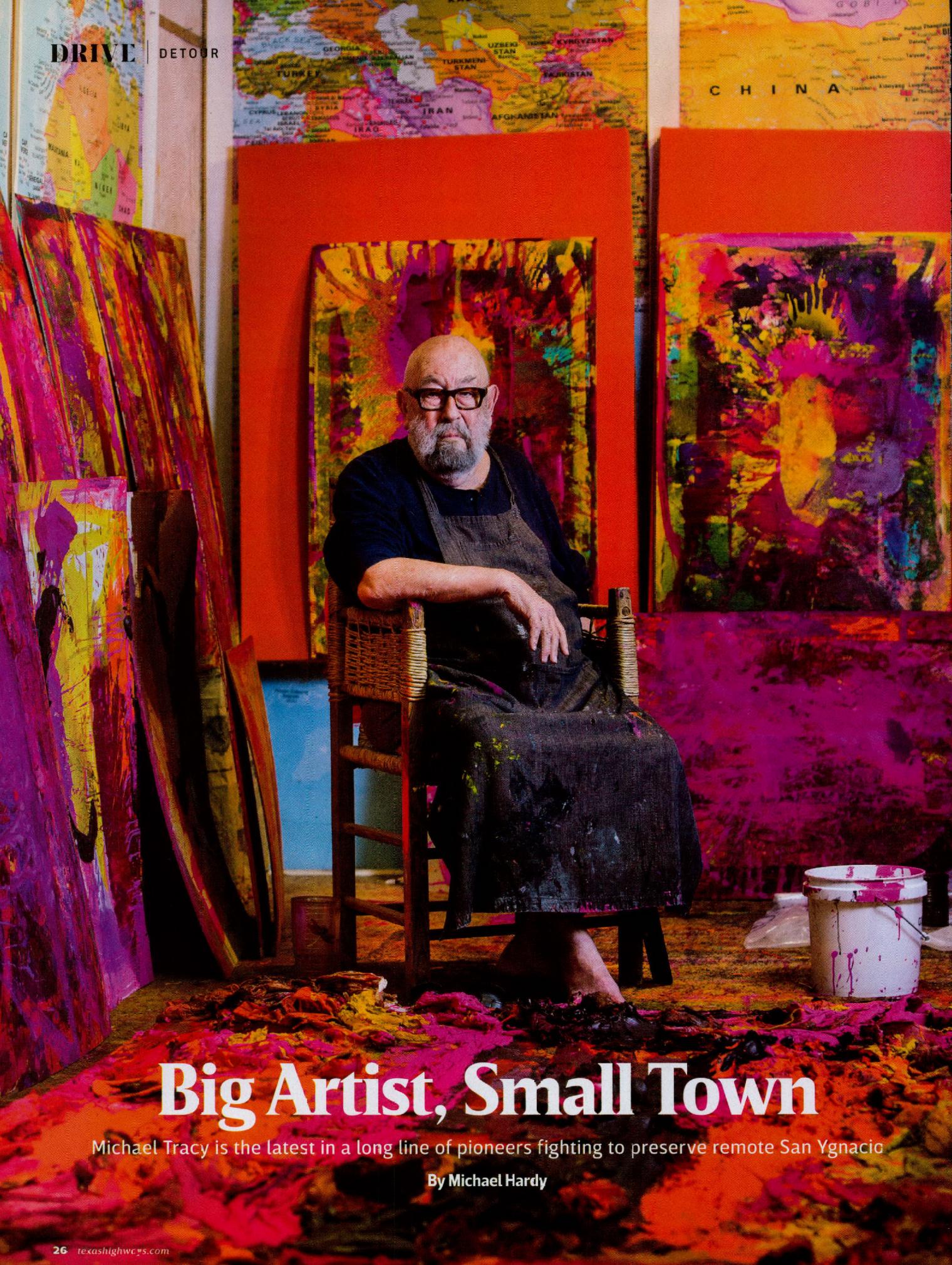


Hundreds of cold-stunned sea turtles in the heated rehabilitation tank at the Texas State Aquarium Wildlife Rescue.

DRIVE



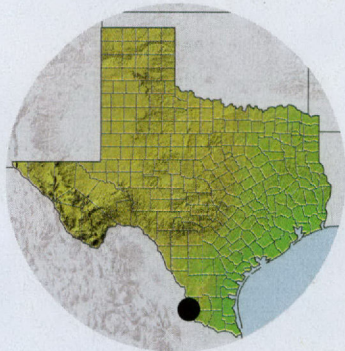
ARTIST MICHAEL
Tracy has restored
the Treviño-Uribe
Rancho in San
Ygnacio.



Big Artist, Small Town

Michael Tracy is the latest in a long line of pioneers fighting to preserve remote San Ygnacio

By Michael Hardy



A work crew was doing maintenance in the small South Texas town of San Ygnacio a decade ago when one of its machines malfunctioned, spraying a ragged strip of asphalt primer along the north facade of the Treviño-Urbe Rancho. This modest complex of one-story stone buildings, the oldest of which dates to 1830, was originally built to protect Mexican ranchers from Comanche raids. What most residents simply call “the fort” had recently been purchased by the River Pierce Foundation, created by Ohio-born artist Michael Tracy, who intended to restore the site to its former condition and turn it into a house museum. The work crew apologized, but Tracy was furious.

“It wasn’t an accident,” he told me in January. We were having dinner at one of several houses and studios in San Ygnacio owned by him and his foundation, whose original purpose was to fund artist residencies but grew in scope to include historic preservation. Since moving there in 1978, the hard-living, kurta-clad artist and his historical restoration projects have divided opinion in this town of about 700 people, nearly all of them Mexican American. Now 78, the artist is increasingly preoccupied with his legacy in San Ygnacio. What will happen to the many historic buildings he owns around town after his death? It’s unclear whether the River Pierce Foundation, which has always relied on Tracy’s wealth and connections, can survive without him. Then again, it’s a minor miracle San Ygnacio’s

Photo: Tom McCarthy Jr.



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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Uribe-Martínez Cemetery, Rio Grande, exterior of Treviño-Uribe Rancho.



history has been preserved at all.

The story of San Ygnacio and the fort begins with its founder, Don Jesús Treviño. In the late 1820s, the wealthy rancher from nearby Revilla bought 125,000 acres of arid brushland straddling the Rio Grande, 35 miles south of present-day Laredo in the recently established state of Coahuila y Texas. To protect his new rancho from Comanche raiders, Treviño built

a one-room stone fort on a mesquite-covered bluff overlooking the east bank of the river. Against the odds, Rancho San Ygnacio survived the tumultuous political events of the ensuing decades. The Texas Revolution made little impact on Treviño's remote outpost, but the annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845, and the subsequent Mexican-American War, changed everything by establishing the

A Laredo Morning Times reporter once called San Ygnacio “the most Mexican of all Texas border villages.”

Rio Grande as the border between the two nations.

South Texas soon fell under attack from a new kind of raider: emboldened Anglos contesting the property rights of settlers like the Treviños. To secure possession of the land, Treviño’s heirs (Treviño himself died in 1843) moved to the American side of the border in 1851, taking up residence in the fort and adding a series of rooms. Under the leadership of Treviño’s son-in-law, Blas María Uribe, a small community of ranch hands and their families grew up around the fort, most living in *jacales*, thatched wattle-and-daub huts.

It’s hard to believe San Ygnacio still exists. When the U.S. and Mexican governments joined forces in the 1950s to build Falcon Dam on the Rio Grande, San Ygnacio and many other upstream communities on both sides of the border were condemned to make room for the new reservoir. Most of the communities accepted buyouts, but San Ygnacio residents fought back, citing the town’s cultural heritage and its location above the reservoir’s maximum water level.

The town was spared and is now one of the oldest continually inhabited communities in South Texas. Laid out around a sleepy central plaza is a grid of streets lined with 19th-century stone buildings, wooden bungalows, and a handful of modern mansions—evidence of the oil money that has accrued to a few locals. There are two cemeteries, an elementary school, and a church, but no restaurants, bars, grocery stores, or stop lights. A *Laredo Morning Times* reporter once called San Ygnacio “the most Mexican of all Texas border villages.”

Photos: Tom McCarthy Jr.



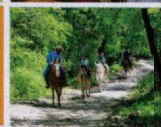
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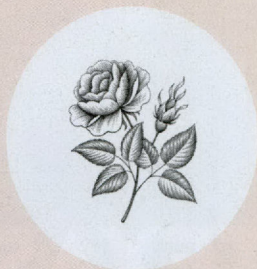
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Treviño-Uribe Rancho

This National Historic Landmark was originally intended to shelter workers from Native American raids.

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Nuestra Señora Del Refugio

This simple sandstone church is the starting point for the Good Friday *procesión*, San Ygnacio's most popular event.

407 Washington Ave.

Uribe-Martínez Cemetery

The smaller of San Ygnacio's two cemeteries is the final resting place of many of the town's founders, including

Blas María Uribe.
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THE GOOD FRIDAY
procesión begins at
Nuestra Señora Del
Refugio.

Tracy felt spiritually drawn to Mexico since first coming to Texas to attend St. Edward's University in Austin. He was living in Galveston in the 1970s when a series of arson fires near his studio spurred him to begin looking for a new place to live. He and his then-boyfriend, Henry Estrada, spent months driving around the state and checked out San Ygnacio on the recommendation of a friend. For an artist seeking solitude and creative inspiration, the remote village seemed perfect.

"This part of the world is very crucial," Tracy told me. "People lived here, and

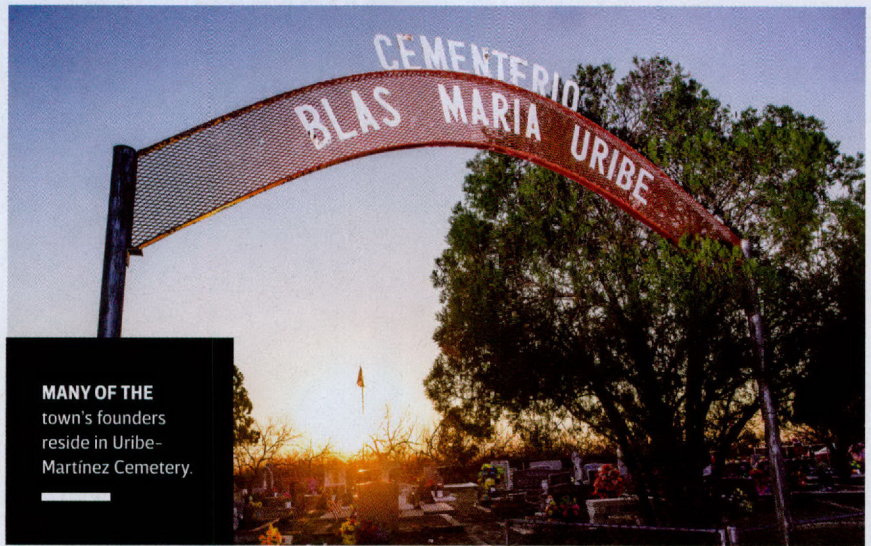
had culture and civilization, before there was electricity, before there were delineations of political power." Raised Roman Catholic, Tracy had long incorporated religious imagery into his sculptures, performance art, and paintings. In 1990 he staged *Sacrifice II: The River Pierce*, an elaborately choreographed piece that involved dozens of costumed volunteers dragging an enormous wood cross to the Rio Grande, lighting it on fire, and setting it afloat.

As Tracy's career flourished, he used the proceeds from selling his art to purchase and restore a series of historic

buildings in San Ygnacio. He staged extravagant parties for visiting clients, turning San Ygnacio into an unlikely art destination, much like Donald Judd was doing in Marfa. "We would wine them and dine them, and they would buy things," recalled Estrada, who worked for a time as Tracy's studio manager. "It became almost a badge of honor for people in the art world to say, 'Oh, we visited Michael Tracy in San Ygnacio.'"

Between 1998 and 2008, Tracy's River Pierce Foundation raised funds to purchase the town's fort complex from descendants of the original families, some of whom were still living there as late as the 1980s. Tracy wanted to restore the deteriorating rancho so both locals and outsiders could experience the town's history firsthand.

This took longer than he anticipated. Although the site was designated a



MANY OF THE town's founders reside in Uribe-Martínez Cemetery.

National Historic Landmark in 1997, it took another decade to stabilize the buildings, conduct archaeological research, and fully restore the complex. These efforts cost about \$500,000, including a \$270,000 grant from the National Park Service and nearly as much in matching funds from donors like the

"People lived here, and had culture and civilization, before there was electricity, before there were delineations of political power."



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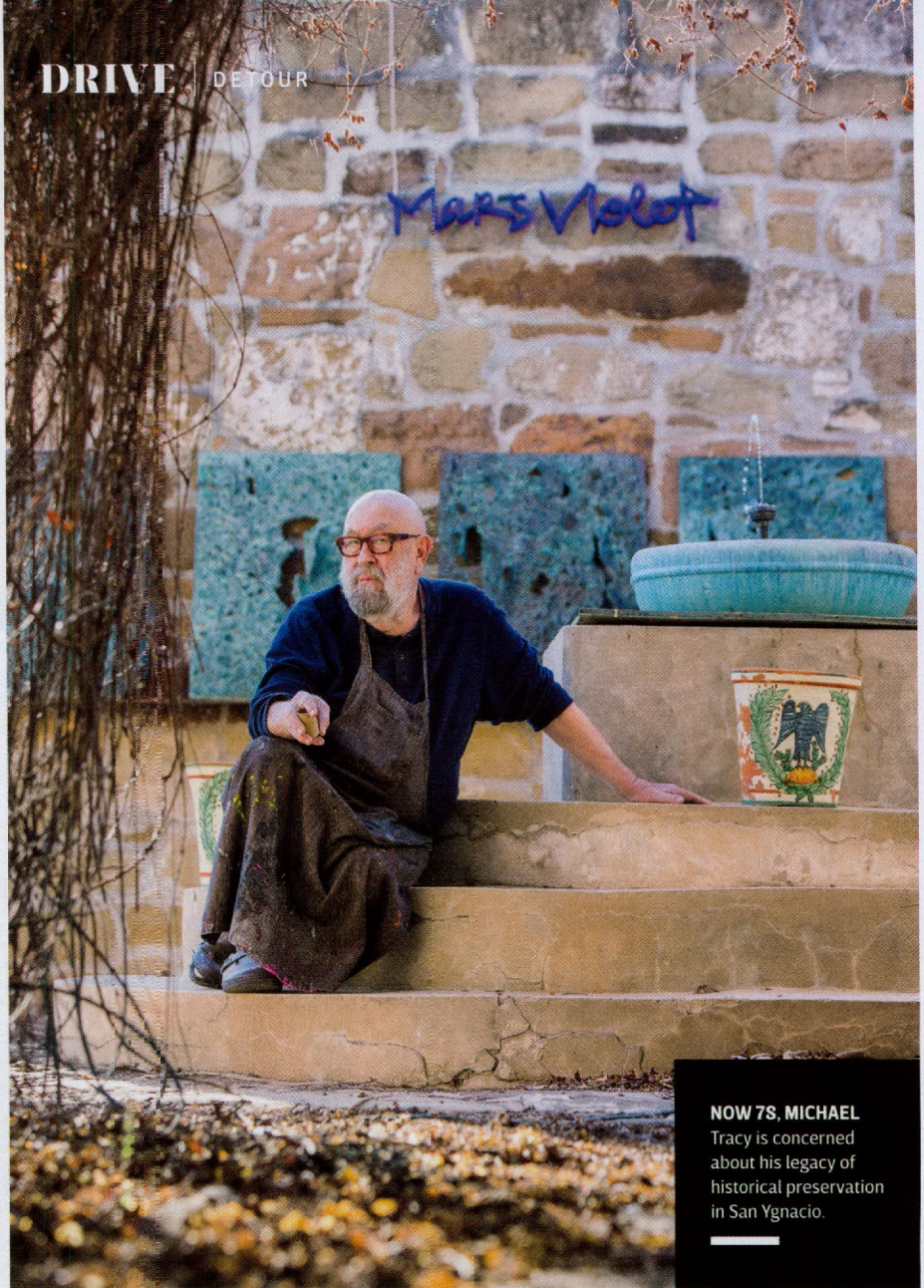
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DRIVE DETOUR



NOW 78, MICHAEL Tracy is concerned about his legacy of historical preservation in San Ygnacio.

Houston-based Brown Foundation.

"Like any great piece of historic architecture, it's a physical manifestation of a time that doesn't exist anymore," said Frank Rotnófsky, the project's lead preservation architect. "It tells the story of the ranching heritage of South Texas. We think about the Fort Worth Stockyards and the cowboys, but it all started down here." The fort opened to the public in 2009, charging no admission. Before the pandemic, it attracted about 3,000 visitors a year, many of them naturalists drawn to the Rio Grande Valley for birding and butterflying.

But Tracy himself grew ambivalent about the restoration, especially as the builders kept uncovering evidence of a

Comanche and Lipan Apache presence that predated the Mexicans' arrival. He found himself siding with "the people who were outside the walls, not on the inside," Tracy said. "Once you've made that identification in your soul, there is no going back—you don't have much compassion for these people who had no right to be here in the first place."

Some of the town's residents began to wonder what right Tracy himself had to be there. They were losing patience with the artist's perceived high-handedness. "If he sees you modifying something on your house, and it's in the historic district, he'll come right up to you and say, 'What the hell are you doing?'" said Christopher Rincón, the River Pierce Foundation's

Tracy has contributed to countless charitable efforts in town, and his free summer camp for kids, focusing on archaeology and local history, is wildly popular.

executive director. "A lot of people feel like, what does it matter? This is my house."

Ester García, a teacher aide at San Ygnacio's A.L. Benavides Elementary School, blames cultural differences for some of the friction. "Michael has a really loud voice, and people think he's mad at them," García said. "He'll say, 'I'm not mad, I just talk like that.' But people get scared." The grievances run both ways. Tracy often feels like he's the only one in town interested in historic preservation. "They don't like it because they didn't do it first," Tracy told me.

Nobody denies Tracy's generosity. He has contributed to countless charitable efforts in town, and his free summer camp for kids, focusing on archaeology and local history, is wildly popular. "He has a rough exterior, but he's a really nice guy inside," García said. "And he doesn't care if you're against him or not; he'll still help you out." García's three children attended Tracy's summer camp and the eldest became so fascinated by the fort that he later got married there.

With his financial resources, Tracy could have upped sticks years ago. He stays in San Ygnacio because, despite his frustrations, he's come to feel at home in what he ruefully calls "this godforsaken place." When he dies, he would like to hand control of the Treviño-Uribe Rancho and the other historic buildings he owns to a worthy organization.

"If I'm passionate, it's not because of the architectural layout of the buildings," he explained. "It's because there has been civilization here for a long time that needs to be respected. This is not a backwater." 🐾

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Horseman, Goodbye

Larry McMurtry, peerless Texas author, giddyups into the sunset

By John Nova Lomax

Larry McMurtry, the self-described “minor regional novelist” who came to embody and define Texas literature, died on March 25. He was 84.

Though rightly revered as a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist (*Lonesome Dove*) and an Academy Award-winning screenwriter (*Brokeback Mountain*), McMurtry’s role as essayist, and more particularly as critic, was of vast importance. We Texans have never had a sterner judge of our native literature than McMurtry, who spurred our words out of the 19th century and into the present and then back again, albeit with a contemporary eye. Our state’s literary works are by far better for the gauntlets he cast down over his career in talks, printed diatribes, and the counterexamples he offered with his oeuvre.

McMurtry was one of the first Texan writers of prominence to dare look back with a jaundiced eye on those who had come before him, whom he called “the Holy Oldtimers.” This included historian Walter Prescott Webb, naturalist Roy Bedichek, and tale-spinner and lore-miner J. Frank Dobie. In his 1968 essay collection *In a Narrow Grave*, McMurtry wrote of these men with something less than reverence, and in his 1981 *Texas Observer* essay “Ever a Bridegroom,” he doubled down.

In the latter, McMurtry recalled that *In a Narrow Grave* was his formal and eternal goodbye to writing about the country, in essence the small-town life that won him fame in his mid-20s and Hollywood cachet in movies based on *The Last Picture Show*; *Horseman, Pass By*; and *Leaving Cheyenne*. Henceforth, he declared, he would stick to urbanites like the Danny Decks and Aurora Greenways of his Houston novels, the Peppers and Harmonys of his mother-daughter series, and the womanizing Washington, D.C.-based

antiquarian Cadillac Jack.

Never one to rest on his laurels, in looking back on all that had come before 1981, McMurtry included his own works (from the “Ever a Bridegroom” essay):

“It took me until around 1972 to write a book that an intelligent reader might want to read twice, and by 1976 I had once again lost the knack. There is nothing very remarkable in this: Writing novels is not a progressive endeavor. One might get better, one might get worse. If I’m lucky and industrious I might recover the knack, or then again I might be very industrious and never recover it.”

Turns out he was both lucky and industrious. And a master of self-contradiction.

Not only did he return to Thalia—the fictional version of his hometown, Archer City—for books like the underrated, darkly comic *Texasville* and his late-period masterpiece *Duane’s Depressed*, but even as he was banging out “Ever a Bridegroom,” he was hard at work on *Lonesome Dove*. This was the last book you’d think McMurtry would ever write, and the first book fiction-reading Texans likely claim today as their favorite.

Unlike the Westerns before it, *Lonesome Dove* was unsparingly violent. Texas Rangers could be heroic or tragically flawed. It also tackled the issue of race, although perfunctorily. And it had compelling, well-rounded female characters in Lorena Wood, Clara Allen, and Elmira Johnson.

The iconoclast of the Old West had picked up the shards of what he’d spent his early career destroying and recast them into a new iconography, one infinitely more complex than its predecessors. The contemporary literature of Texas is likewise more interesting and honest than it was when McMurtry discovered it. Thank the stars above he was not averse to contradictions, least of all those of the self. **L**



Horse Before the Cart

Traveling Texas wasn't always so easy

By John Lumpkin



Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, one of Texas' earliest explorers and the state's first historian, had only his feet to transport him hundreds of miles through South Texas from 1528 to 1535 after his Spanish expedition was shipwrecked. Horses from his homeland wouldn't be introduced until the next decade, and walking continued to be an essential mode of transportation in Texas for the next three centuries.

"Most immigrants had to walk to where they were going," says Hugh Hemphill, a historian at the Texas Transportation Museum in San Antonio. "The trails they used were formed by migrating herds of animals long before humans came on the scene. In due course, Indigenous people used the trails, often nomadically. Settlers with wagons made them wider. And people with cars paid taxes on gasoline so they could be paved."

This evolution of Texas travel from walking to our current car culture took place over thousands of years, but the trend of utilizing machinery for efficiency has been a part of the process from the beginning.

After settlers arrived with horses, Native Americans devised horse-drawn travois—animal-powered sledges used to carry goods—and explorers rode a succession of horse-, mule-, or ox-driven conveyances. These included carts, wagons, carriages, and stagecoaches, our first land-based mass transit. In the 1800s, railroads changed the equation for long-distance travel, and bicycles briefly flourished in Texas cities as the 20th century approached, supplanting foot or horse travel for short distances.

The first automobiles in Texas appeared in 1899, although they were curiosities until Henry Ford invented the Model T in 1908 for the nation's emerging middle class. Now, more than 22 million cars, trucks, and buses travel our intricate highway system—more than one vehicle per every adult Texan.

Cruise Control

A brief history of getting from Point A to Point B.

1542

The first herd of imported Spanish horses arrives in Texas.

1837

Houston and the port of Harrisburg on Buffalo Bayou are connected by Texas' first horse-drawn stagecoach line, a year after the Battle of San Jacinto.

1869

The *San Antonio Express-News* reports a local resident built the city's first known bicycle, most likely a wooden-wheel variety nicknamed the "bone-shaker."

1891

Dallas' first electric streetcar begins operation, 20 years after the city's first horse-drawn public tram appeared.

1907

Entrepreneur W.B. Chenoweth establishes Texas' first intercity bus line, which connected the West Texas towns of Colorado City and Snyder and carried passengers on a six-cylinder "motor-driven stagecoach."

1918

The last year of operation of an intercity horse-driven stage line in Texas, which connected the towns of Llano, Mason, Fredericksburg, and Brady.

1899

Year Texas' first gasoline-powered car was shipped to Terrell and driven to Dallas

98.7 million

Ridership of Texas bus companies at its peak in 1949

\$3,000

Cost, in today's dollars, to ride from San Antonio to El Paso via stage-coach line in the 1850s



Travel Stops

Pull over at these museums and attractions that showcase Texas' transportation history.

Learn about the Indigenous Texan horse culture and the cowboy era at Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon. Other exhibits include early wagons and automobiles. panhandleplains.org

Tour the Texas Transportation Museum in San Antonio. Exhibits include Model Ts, Model As, vintage trucks, horse-drawn carriages, and an 1890s velocipede, a hand-and-foot-driven contraption that fit on railroad tracks. txtransportationmuseum.org

Turn into the Texas Department of Transportation's westbound rest stop at Mile Marker 360 on Interstate 20 near Ranger, which features a Model T and a replica of an early 1920s gas station.

Ride the M-Line Trolley from downtown Dallas to restaurants and shopping along McKinney Ave. in Uptown. Vintage rolling stock includes "Rosie," built in 1909 and recently restored. The trolley service claims Rosie is the oldest operating streetcar in the nation. mata.org

Visit car museums in Clifton, De Leon, Hillsboro, Nocona, and Weatherford, a motorcycle museum in Vanderpool, and even an RV museum in Amarillo, with RVs dating to the 1930s.

Pick It Up

"Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.

Don't let 'em pick guitars or drive them old trucks."

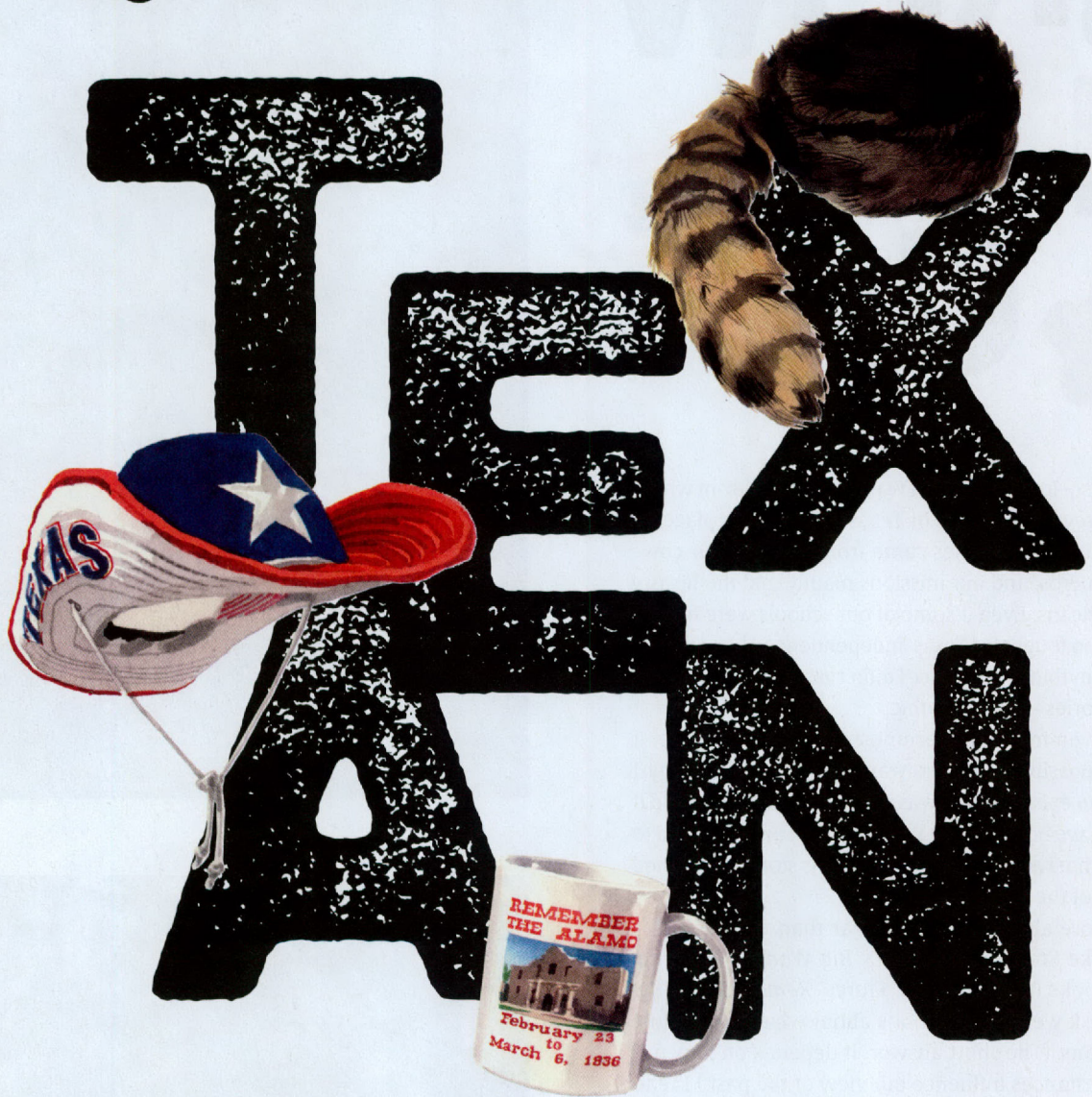
So Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings implored in their classic 1978 duet. Mamma or her progeny must not have been paying attention: There are now at least 4.2 million pickups in Texas out of 22 million registered vehicles overall, making pickups an obvious favorite for Texans on the road.

Henry Ford built the first pickup in 1917, and factory-made versions were available starting in 1925. Priced at \$281, they had steel beds 4½ feet long and 40 inches wide. The 2021 Ford F-450 sports an "8-foot box" with front and rear seats in a luxury-appointed cab, costing close to \$100,000 fully loaded. Extravagance and town driving aside, the legacy of Texas pickups resides in oil fields, pastures, fence lines, and construction sites.

"Deep down, Texans like to think of themselves as cowboys, as living on the frontier by their own wits," says Hemphill, the Texas Transportation Museum historian. "The pickup speaks to this rural heritage. You might just be commuting to your office or buying some scented candles from Bed Bath & Beyond, but deep down you feel a connection to the old days."

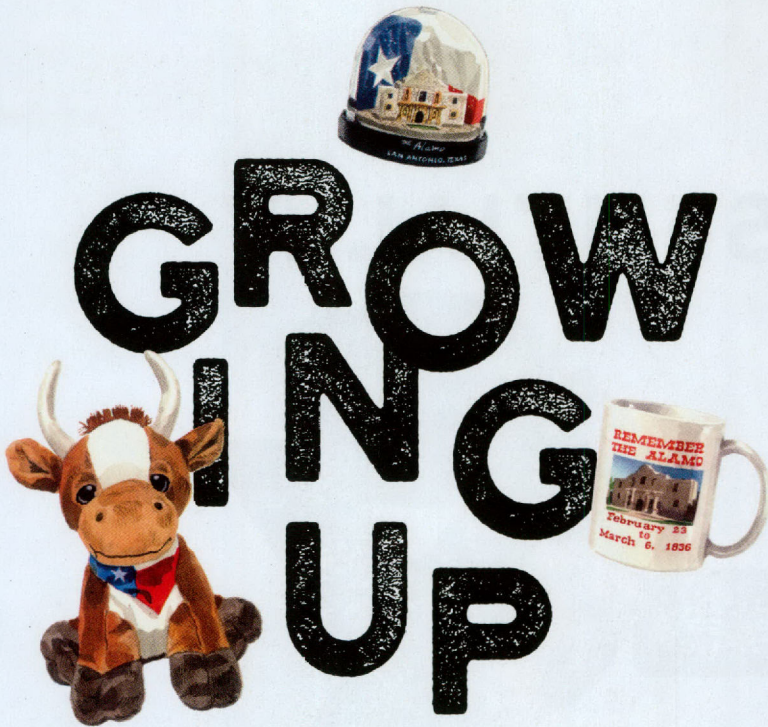


QUINTESSENTIALLY



A LONGTIME TEXAN SEARCHES FOR THE SOUL OF THE STATE IN ITS MOST LEGENDARY LANDMARKS

BY ROBERTO JOSÉ ANDRADE FRANCO
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATTHEW COOK



GROW ING UP

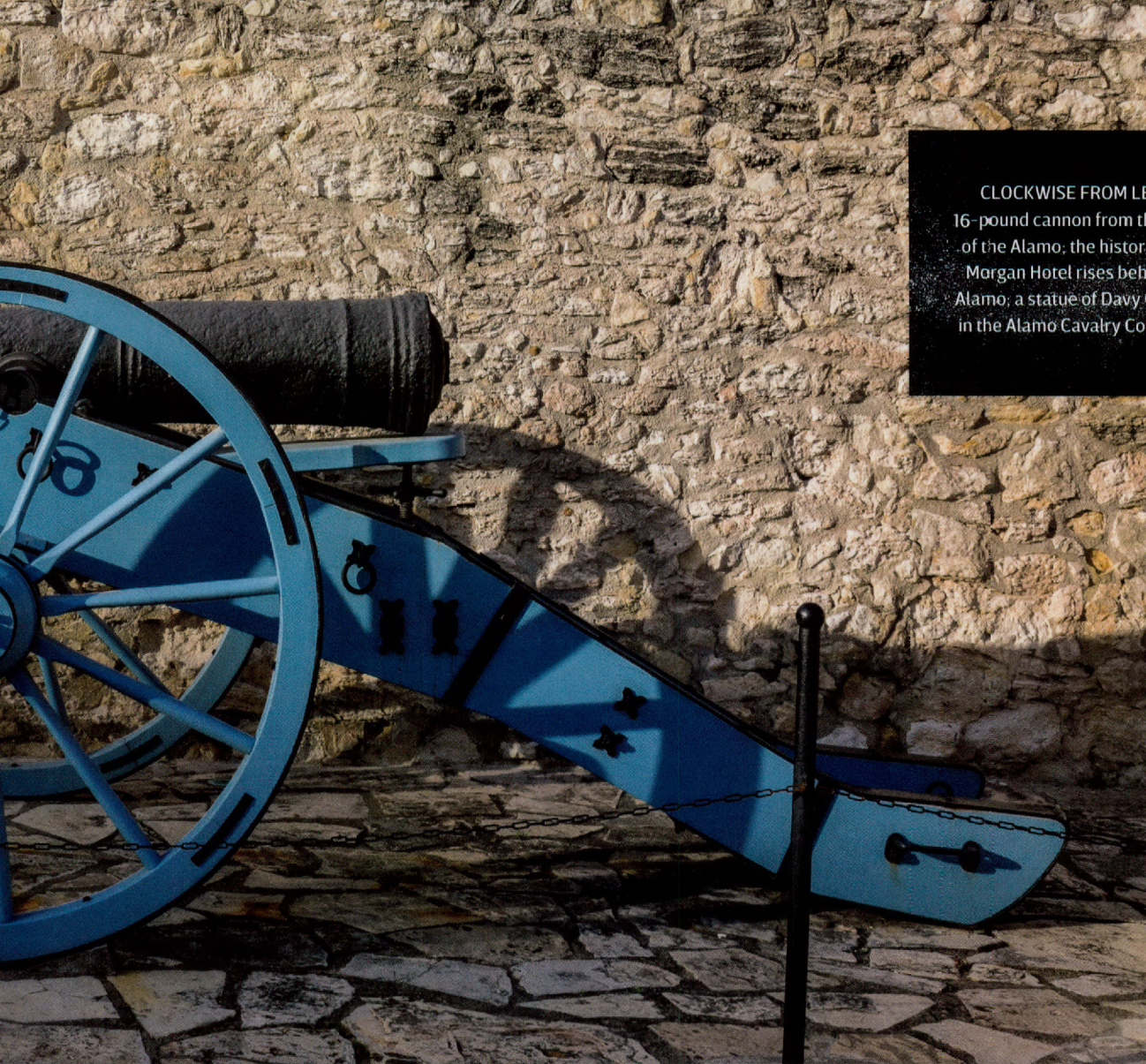
along the El Paso–Juárez border, I was a long drive from where much of the prevailing stories of Texas history took place. El Pasoans' revolutionary heroes came from Mexico. Our cowboys were vaqueros, and our missions mainly told the history of Native Americans. Even if some of our schools were named after people who fought for Texas' independence, those names hardly meant anything to me since I didn't grow up hearing their well-known stories—real or mythic.

Of course, even in the westernmost corner of the state, it was almost impossible to live unaware of the Texas ideology. I knew the Alamo existed, but it was so distant from my world it might as well have been in New York. It wasn't until I moved to Dallas in 2014 that I noticed just how much its story is ingrained in the identity of the state.

I've read more about Texas this year than ever before—thick tomes like Stephen Harrigan's *Big Wonderful Thing*; and smaller books like Richard R. Flores' *Remembering the Alamo*. Both ask weighty questions about what a place like the Alamo means. (The short answer: It depends on how our present circumstances influence our view of the past.) I read books written by Texas writers and by outsiders obsessed with the state's legends. I read about things I had just absorbed from living here. Not even two months into 2021, I had read 11 Texas-related books. My reading inspired me to finally set out to see these foundational places with my own eyes.

First up was the Alamo, where I placed my palm on the cool stone walls that had been there before there was a Texas, before there was even a United States. Next, I visited the Fort Worth Stockyards and walked the same brick-paved roads where countless Longhorns and cowboys once strode. In El Paso, I had lived most of my life between two places, and neither one of them made me think I was "Texan." I wanted to find out if traveling to these touchstones could change that.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: a 16-pound cannon from the Battle of the Alamo; the historic Emily Morgan Hotel rises behind the Alamo; a statue of Davy Crockett in the Alamo Cavalry Courtyard.



Photos: Eric W. Pohl

“A common misconception from visitors is the size of the Alamo,” said Michael Marino, a supervisor at the historic mission. During his tours, he often points to a map he carries while walking the sidewalks between the Alamo’s structures, statues, and trees with thick, winding limbs. Marino has worked at the Alamo for five years, his love of history nourished from his childhood in Brownsville, where he grew up “hearing stories of folklore, local *leyendas* [legends], and history.”

Like most first-time visitors, I also imagined the Alamo would be bigger. I’d read so much about how it casts the longest of shadows over Texas—and the world’s view of Texas. It’s a top historical tourist destination. (English musician Phil Collins owns the biggest collection of Alamo artifacts, 400 of which will be on permanent display at the Alamo starting spring 2022.) I expected the Alamo to be the size of a football stadium—the type of building seen from miles away, swallowing everything surrounding it with its presence. But the Alamo, or what remains of it, is easy to miss in part because it’s nestled between towering buildings. “Visitors are always genuinely surprised that the Alamo is at the heart of the city,” Marino continued. “They usually assume it’s outside of the city limits in the open land.”

I first glimpsed it the previous evening. Since I had read Lawrence Wright’s *God Save Texas*, where he describes the Alamo as “yellowed by



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: the Fort Worth Stockyards holds twice-daily cattle drives, legendary Fort Worth bootmaker M.L. Leddy's, a motorcycle club rides into the Stockyards.

the patina of age, like old teeth," I almost expected the area to smell funny. It didn't. The Alamo looked even smaller at night, when only its facade was illuminated by floorlights. It also looked more peaceful. Except for the stray tourist, there was hardly anyone around. With most of the downtown traffic gone, the Alamo looked especially removed from the 13-day siege that destroyed 80% of the structure.

Gone are the four walls and gate that helped guard the 4-acre fort in its days as a mission on the Texas frontier. Gone are the headquarters from where William Barrett Travis wrote his letter to the public saying the Alamo was under attack, asking for help, but also vowing to "never surrender or retreat." That's the same letter Gov. George W. Bush read aloud to inspire the 1999 U.S. golf team when it was losing to Europe in the Ryder Cup. Perhaps it was just a coincidence, but the U.S. team won.

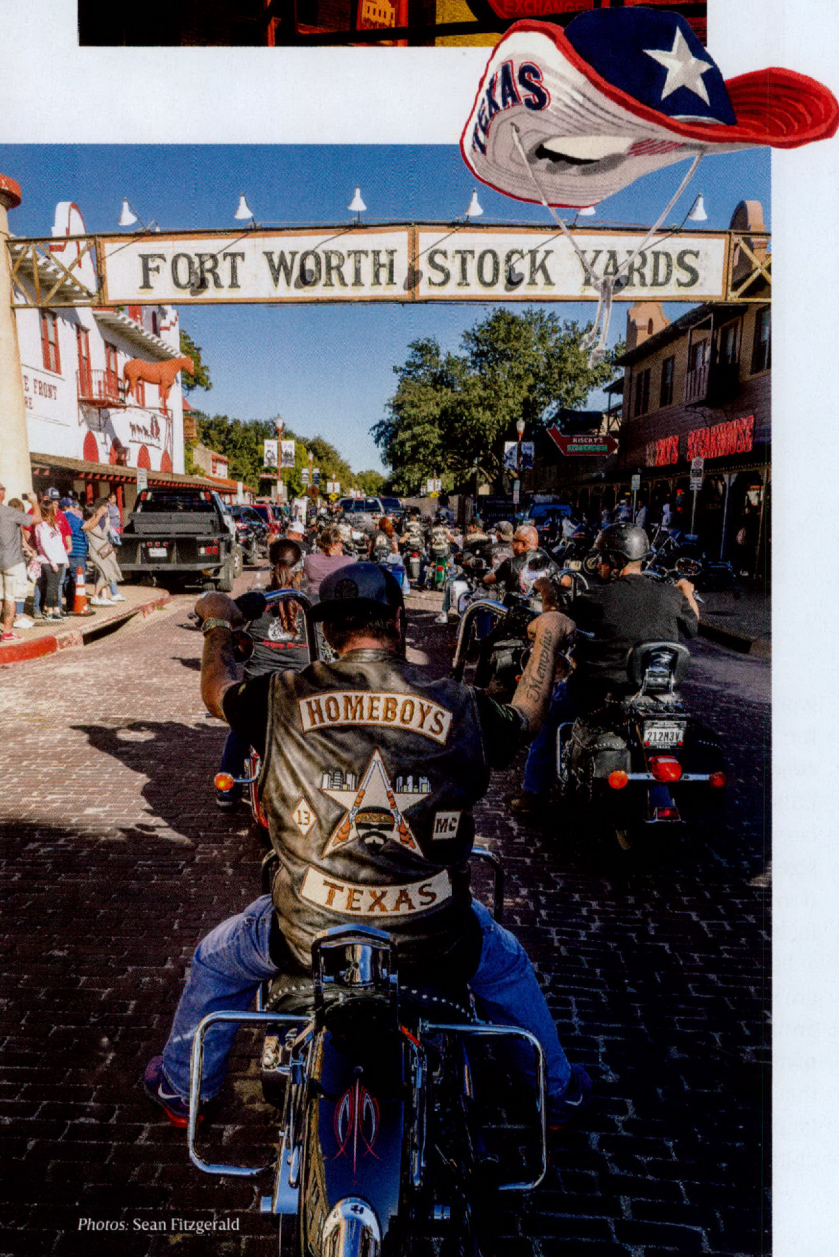
When I visited again the next morning, this time venturing inside, solemnity replaced the previous day's tranquil feeling. The building most associated with the Alamo is a church, which made me feel as if I had to whisper. And the Alamo is still the site where 185 years ago, 189 people died fighting for Texas independence. No prisoners taken. All bodies burned.

"The Alamo is a site of reverence," Marino said. "It is a symbol of the Texas spirit." Foreign visitors have told him about their country's last-stand battles, which, like the Alamo, have become mythologized in

forming part of their national identity. These stories are easy to inherit, difficult to untangle. In Texas, they've become part of the landscape.

A short walk from the Alamo's long barrack, the Alamo Cenotaph stands 50 feet high and is made of pink Texas granite and gray Georgia marble. Travis, James Bowie, Davy Crockett, and James Bonham—those figures whom I'd always heard of but until recently didn't fully appreciate—stand out from the rest. While the monument includes other figures, these four are larger and their names are listed above each of their heads, unlike the rest that are etched around the base. In recent years, the monument became a point of contention. As part of the Alamo Plaza's makeover, a proposal to move the monument a few hundred feet south aroused anger from some history buffs. The various reasons included believing the cenotaph is located where the Texas revolutionaries are buried, which Marino called "a long-standing myth."

People gathered to protest the proposal. One woman arrived on horseback. A few people spoke with their voices full of emotion. And some—because the chapel and barrack



that were once Spanish, then Mexican, are today as Texan as cowboys and Longhorns—equated their fight with the original defenders of the Alamo. The protest worked, and the monument stayed put.

My family moved away from Texas in the mid-1980s, when it became clear that my father's job as a mechanic wouldn't provide enough to sustain our family. My father joined the United States Army, and after that we were always on the move until we returned to El Paso in time for me to attend high school. We lived in places like Colorado and Chicago, and even farther away from Texas, in Germany. One academic year, I attended four different schools on military bases.

On my first day of school in the middle of the semester, teachers told me to introduce myself to the class. I said something like, "My name is Roberto, and I'm from El Paso, Texas." As soon as I said "Texas," I knew what was coming next. Questions from classmates, sometimes even the teacher, asking if I rode horses, owned cows, or dressed like a cowboy. More than once, someone shouted the slogan of the state's anti-littering campaign: Don't mess with Texas!

I grew tired of telling my classmates I'd never even stood close to a cow, much less a Longhorn, which is what I envisioned when people talked about the beast synonymous with Texas. Until then, the only Longhorns I'd ever seen were the ones that played football on TV.

"Some people in other countries, they think we still wear six-shooters on our hips—and some people do—or that we ride our horses to work," said Teresa Burleson, an award-winning cowgirl poet and director of the Stockyards Museum inside Fort Worth's Livestock Exchange Building. In the early 1900s when Fort Worth was one of the country's major centers of the livestock industry—along with Chicago, St. Louis, Omaha, and Kansas City—the building was known as the "Wall Street of the West."

Twice a day, every day—save for a few holidays—a cattle drive proceeds in front of the Livestock Exchange. Along with a few dozen spectators, I stood there one sunny Wednesday afternoon as I watched 16 Longhorns, each representing a decade of the city's history, saunter down the street, with cowboys on horseback at the front, middle, and rear of the parade. The smell of live cattle overpowered that of cooked ones coming from a nearby steakhouse. The marching Longhorns were calm but intimidating with their long, twisted horns that seemed to point in every direction. They were so close, I could see their saliva dripping, a string falling every few feet they walked. Standing in such close proximity to what J. Frank Dobie in *The Longhorns* called, "the peer of bison or grizzly bear," I couldn't help but think of the damage they'd cause if even one went off course.

"People don't realize how big they are until they see them in person," Burleson said. The average Longhorn



at the Stockyards weighs 1,500 pounds. The biggest: one, 700 pounds heavier. Longhorns are genetic descendants of the first cattle brought by Christopher Columbus, and they originally lived largely in the wild. But once the cattle industry flourished, Longhorns helped make Fort Worth what Burleson called the “Texas-most city” since “it represents what people believe Texas to be.”

Out of that same industry came cowboys—Mexican vaqueros originally—who held riding and roping competitions that eventually became rodeos. Longhorns, which look as big in person as the Alamo looks small, are the nucleus from which the Texas mythos developed. Both still define what represents Texas to those who live here and those who’ve never stepped foot in the state.

At both of these iconic sites, there’s a juxtaposition between the past and present. It’s physical, like seeing the sign for an IMAX movie theater peering over the back walls of the Alamo. Or, like watching Longhorns and cowboys on horseback next to a black 2020 Jeep Compass, or seeing the Livestock Exchange Building alongside the recently built Hotel Drifter whose façade is designed to look like it’s been there since the early 1900s too.

It’s also metaphysical. It’s the spirit, for better or worse, that makes Texas unlike any other place in the country—or



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: the tequila almond croissant at La Panaderia in San Antonio; Risky's Barbeque in the Fort Worth Stockyards; the Emily Morgan Hotel in San Antonio.

world. It’s why Bush read Travis’ letter to a team of golfers and why protestors carried “Remember the Alamo” signs while standing in front of the cenotaph. It’s the fact that despite my knowing the cattle drive is more honorary than anything else, I still wanted to see the famed animals close-up. It’s understanding why the Alamo, despite its underwhelming size and its complicated history, looms large in our collective imagination. It’s the way I’ve become increasingly obsessed with the state I live in, even if I don’t always feel like a Texan.

Fort Worth evolved from its stockyards in the same way San Antonio grew its city around the Alamo’s remains. Texans took that destroyed fort and turned tragic loss into a righteous birth. Out of that came history and myth to help cover the uncomfortable truths, and legends and folklore that give everyday things their potency. All of these symbols and historic landmarks create a Texan identity so distinct that even elementary school children thousands of miles away recognize it instantly. **L**



QUINTESSENTIAL

TEXAS ROAD TRIP

Where to stay in San Antonio: Named after the woman who supposedly distracted Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna during the decisive battle for Texas independence, the Emily Morgan Hotel is a minute's walk from the Alamo. Originally a Medical Arts Building, the hotel's ornaments include gargoyles depicting medical afflictions. *The Emily Morgan Hotel, 705 E. Houston St., San Antonio. 210-225-5100; emilymorganhotel.com*

Where to eat in San Antonio: A four-minute walk from the Alamo, La Panadería specializes in *pan dulce* influenced by techniques used in French, Italian, and American breadmaking. The tequila almond croissant is a must try. For the lunchtime crowd, the café also offers salads and tortas. *La Panadería, 301 E. Houston St., San Antonio. 210-592-6264; lapanaderia.com*

Where to stay at the Stockyards: Open since 1907, the Stockyards Hotel, with its Old West theme, has hosted many legends from country-western music, including Willie Nelson and Trisha Yearwood. You can even book the room Bonnie and Clyde rented in 1933, complete with photographs and newspaper clippings of the infamous Texas outlaw couple. *Stockyards Hotel, 109 E. Exchange Ave., Fort Worth. 817-625-6427; stockyardshotel.com*

Where to eat at the Stockyards: Risky's Barbeque has served its slow-smoked, hand-rubbed-with-“Risky Dust” ribs, brisket, sausage, chicken, and other favorites for over 90 years. You can enjoy Risky's Barbeque, located at the start of the cattle drive, while being surrounded by the most historic parts of the city. *Risky's Barbeque, 140 E. Exchange Ave., Fort Worth. 817-626-7777; riskys.com*



The

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Ties

FROM LEFT: Writer Clayton Maxwell and her family at a Palo Duro Canyon overlook; palm trees in Brownsville



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Bind

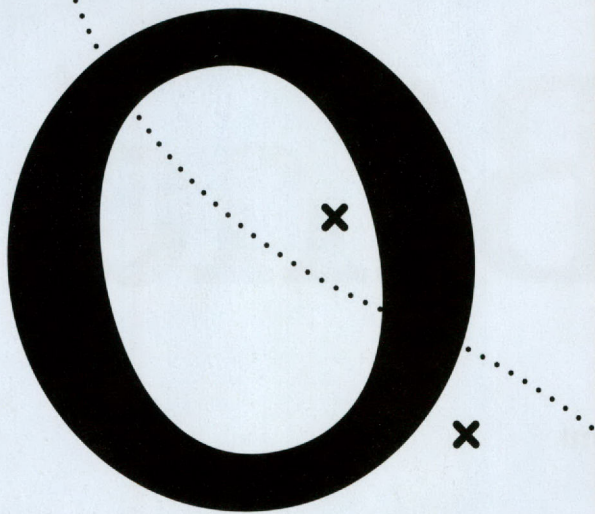
Finding common ground on a road trip from
the Panhandle to the Rio Grande Valley



That

By Clayton Maxwell | Photographs by Kenny Braun

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“One and indivisible”—these two words conclude the compact 17-word pledge of allegiance to the Texas state flag. For the last year, I’ve heard my 11-year-old son recite the pledge every morning during online school. Because most of my interactions with the rest of Texas during this pandemic have been through a laptop, those two words burrowed in and left me asking: If we are indivisible, what unites us? What common ground do I share with Texans up in the dry flatlands of the Panhandle? Or with those in the balmy valley of the Rio Grande? Sometimes finding an answer means you’ve got to turn off the laptop and drive.

On the morning of Jan. 2, my husband, son, and I borrowed a camper van from a neighbor, loaded up our dog, Jake, and headed out on a six-day expedition. With our face masks hanging on easy-access hooks, we set out to traverse the state from the Oklahoma border to the Gulf, exploring new places and meeting new people. On the way, we hoped to find what values we share with a few of the other 29 million people who call Texas home.

It was a tall order. Our state is too big and complex to condense into a simple pledge. And yet, as the van’s odometer clicked on, we met a diverse set of Texans who, despite living very different lives, all had one thing in common: a fierce dedication to their callings and communities.

After an eight-hour drive from our Austin home, we pulled into Canadian, a Panhandle town of 3,000 along the Canadian River, and checked into a revamped motel called The Last Cowboy’s Court. Our room was a warm hug for road-weary souls, with a crimson clawfoot tub, coffee from the local Brown Bag Roasters, artisan soaps, and ranching photos on the walls. My husband, Scott, in describing the boutique lodging’s refined touches, used a Spanish word—*esmero*, which translates to “care.” But *esmero* means more than care; it emanates from the heart. As a Spanish professor described it to me: “Someone doing





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
 Author John Erickson and
 his dog Rosie on their Pan-
 handle Ranch; the historic
 Canadian River Wagon
 Bridge in Canadian; The
 Canadian Restaurant.

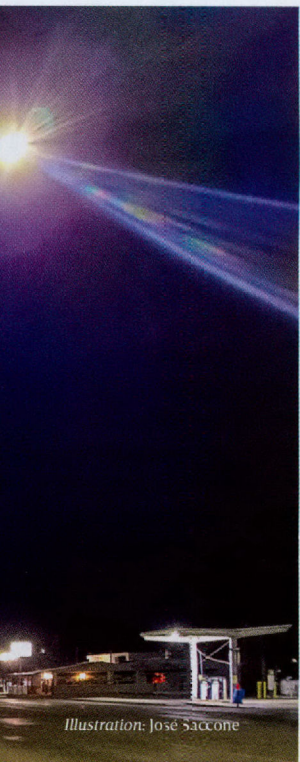



Illustration: José Saccone



something with *esmero* shows a deep love for what she does, as if doing it gave sense to everything in the life of this person.” And, we were soon to find out, there’s plenty of *esmero* here—not just at The Last Cowboy’s Court, but throughout Canadian.

The next morning we met Tiffani Kirkland, then a waitress at The Canadian Restaurant. Wearing a trucker’s hat with the words “Red Dirt” stitched on the front, Kirkland not only knew the names of almost every customer who walked in, she also knew their orders from the menu of classics like omelets and steaks. With country music playing in the background, Kirkland refilled our coffee and told us how the town made it through 2020.

“We helped each other,” Kirkland said. “When a family had to quarantine, we brought them casseroles, or we’d pick up kids from school. Canadian’s a close-knit community. We’ve known each other most of our lives, and our parents have, too.”

As the oil industry here dried up—a consequence of geopolitics, oversupply, and reduced demand during the pandemic—Kirkland’s oil field customers disappeared as well. But the ranchers still came in every morning. “This is Jimmy Schafer,” she said, pointing

to a photo on the wall of a man in a white cowboy hat staring into the eyes of a Longhorn. “He just randomly shows up and hangs his pictures on the wall. He is 91 and comes in every day. If he misses a day, we call.”

A day ago Canadian was a dot on my computer screen; now it was real faces and the biggest pancakes my son, Harry, had ever seen. Our next stop was the office of *The Canadian Record*, where we met Laurie Ezzell Brown, the *Record*’s editor and publisher since she and her mother took over from her late father in 1993. Brown explained how the oil slump and closures from the coronavirus pandemic have put Canadian in a precarious place. “Every week we hear about a business closing, a business laying off their employees, a business relocating,” Brown said.

But Canadian and surrounding Hemphill County have a long history of challenges. In 2017, a megafire swept across this part of the Panhandle, killing cattle and turning the land black. People came from across Texas and beyond,



hauling hay and water for surviving livestock, along with fencing materials to help ranchers rebuild.

“It was staggering, the damage. But we rebounded tremendously,” Brown said. “When you’re fighting the pandemic, when you’re fighting wildfires, when you’re fighting all the things that are affecting us right now, the question is, how are we going to get through this together? Nine-tenths of the people who come through the door of the newspaper say, ‘I don’t always agree with you, but you sure put out a great newspaper.’ It is possible for us to have different viewpoints and still get along. Actually, in a town like this, it’s essential.”

We hit the road again to meet John Erickson, whose series of Hank the Cowdog books are loved around the globe. On the drive to Erickson’s ranch, about 45 minutes from Canadian, Harry read Hank stories out loud, switching voices from Hank to Drover, his sidekick, to Pete the Barn Cat. The dirt road to Erickson’s house—Hank’s Road—leaves the flatlands behind as it dips down into a scarlet canyon.

Kris, John’s wife of 53 years, greeted us in front of the new house they’d just finished building after their previous home burned in the 2017 fire.

As we talked in the spacious new living room with unobstructed views of the blue sky and red caprock, I saw how much Erickson loves this land.

“It’s a beautiful piece of God’s creation, and it nourishes my spirit every day,” said Erickson, who grew up in nearby Perryton. “I put myself in the position to be the medium that pulls thoughts, emotions, symbols, mythology—whatever it is—out of the atmosphere and put it into a form that brings delight to families. I really don’t know how that happens.”

Erickson pursues his craft with a devotion that goes back to the biblical stories his mother told him as a young boy. “Art should make people laugh or cry or come to a deeper appreciation of who they are in this infinite universe that we occupy,” he said. “It should aspire to the same standards that the lady in Perryton who makes hot tamales for my wife adheres to, which is you must make your customer better. It’s a relationship of trust.”



Hiking the CCC Trail
in Palo Duro Canyon
State Park.

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Esmero, it seems, manifests in both writing and tamales.

Too soon, we said our goodbyes and headed for Palo Duro Canyon State Park, our destination for the night. We traced the Canadian River east before heading south through Amarillo and arriving at the park just as the sky turned rosy with sunset. After crossing so much tortilla-flat land, we were stunned to find ourselves on the edge of this geologic wonder, to witness its dramatic red and orange valley, its rocky buttes and mesas. The metaphor was inescapable; it's what our trip had been so far. A part of Texas that had seemed flat to me—just because I didn't know it—had surprised me with depth and beauty. It just took spending some time here.

Cisco

The next morning, we packed up camp, took a short hike to warm up after the 17-degree night, and departed for Cisco, where I'd heard about a shop that serves a very good cup of coffee. The five-hour drive started with a dusty grind down Interstate 27 to Lubbock, then veered east through arid hills, pastureland, and wind farms toward Abilene. Our road fatigue lifted the moment we arrived in Cisco and walked into Waverly's Coffee and Gifts, with its high ceilings, book-lined walls, and aroma of coffee. The creation of Sean King, a writer, minister, and barista, Waverly's overturned my ignorant assumption that you can't find good coffee in tiny towns. King makes each cup on the spot in a



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jahmicah Dawes, owner of Slim Pickins Outfitters in Stephenville, with his dog, Bill Murray; Riley's Tavern in Hunter. Owner Javier Salinas in his Brownsville vacation rental, Hicks-Gregg House (bottom left).



Stephenville

High on caffeine and good conversation, we piled back in the van for an hourlong jaunt southeast on Interstate 20 and Ranch Road 2214 through subtle green hills to Stephenville. We wanted to check in with Jahmicah Dawes, the proprietor of one of the only Black-owned outdoors shops in the country. Slim Pickins Outfitters sits in a spruced up Rexall Pharmacy storefront on the town square; its motto is “Act Justly, Love Kindly, Serve Humbly.”

Just like others we’d met on our trip, Dawes has struggled to keep his business afloat this past year. But his dedication to his mission has kept him going. Along with building his online sales, he’s established strategic partnerships with groups like Black Outside, a San Antonio nonprofit that engages Black youth with the outdoors.

“For the longest time,” he said, “you’ve had people of color being stewards of the land and being told, ‘It’s not yours.’ But the first African Americans grew up on the land. I want to help people reconnect. I want to build this so our kids will feel safe, both in the world and in the outdoors.”

Mid-conversation, Dawes saw the Stephenville police chief walking by and dashed out to the sidewalk to talk with him. Since last June, Dawes and Chief Dan Harris, whom Dawes calls “Chief,” have been meeting monthly with a small group of police officers and community leaders of color to “break bread” and better understand each other.

“We clear off the table, sit down with some pizza, and talk—and, well, it’s been phenomenal,” reflected Harris, who’s been an officer for over 30 years. “We respect each other and love each other.”

Hunter

Since our goal for the day was to make it to the Hill Country, we said goodbye to Dawes and steered the van south on US highways 281 and 183 as soft hills gave way to the spreading megalopolis of Austin, then Interstate 35, then San Marcos. We turned southwest into the choppy topography of the Edwards Plateau and reached Hunter, a backroads town where Joel and Angie Hofmann run Riley’s Tavern. The historic dive bar dates to 1933, when 17-year-old J.C. Riley hightailed it up to the State Capitol in a Model T to nab the first beer license granted to a Texas bar after Prohibition.

Relieved to trade in the steering wheel for a cold one, we rested our bones at a picnic table on the back patio. Joel, who bought Riley’s in 2004, told us about the regulars who’ve stuck by them during the pandemic, some of whom grew up visiting the tavern. “The whole pandemic was really hard on the bartenders more than anything,” Angie added. “A lot of our regulars—people with different thoughts and views—pitched in and donated money. Some of them don’t even like each other, but they still came together.”

A shared love for a historic honky-tonk—now that is something Texans can rally around.



French press. One sip paired with a bite of maple pecan strudel, and I could taste just how wrong I’d been. It was delicious esmero.

We hung out in the sun-filled art room, adjacent to the café, where King’s wife, Kasity, hosts occasional art workshops and the couple homeschool their kids. King said he’s taken on yard work and sculpting to make extra money during the pandemic. His sense of purpose was moving. I asked him how people were getting along in Cisco.

“In our small community, you just have to get to know people,” King said. “And when you get to know them, you sharpen each other, you connect as humans. That’s what this coffee shop has been—a cultural crossroads where a lawn-mower man can sit down with a millionaire, or an atheist can sit down with a Christian and have a conversation.”

Can't-Miss Stops Along the Route

Canadian

Brown Bag Roasters: Coffee and community next door to *The Canadian Record* newspaper. brownbagroasters.com

The Last Cowboy's Court: One of Texas' coziest motels. lastcowboyscourt.com

Cisco

Waverly's Coffee and Gifts: A welcoming spot for coffee and pastries, as well as a fine selection of books and children's toys. waverlystexas.com

Stephenville

Slim Pickins Outfitters: A fun, friendly outdoor gear shop on the square. slimpickinsoutfitters.com

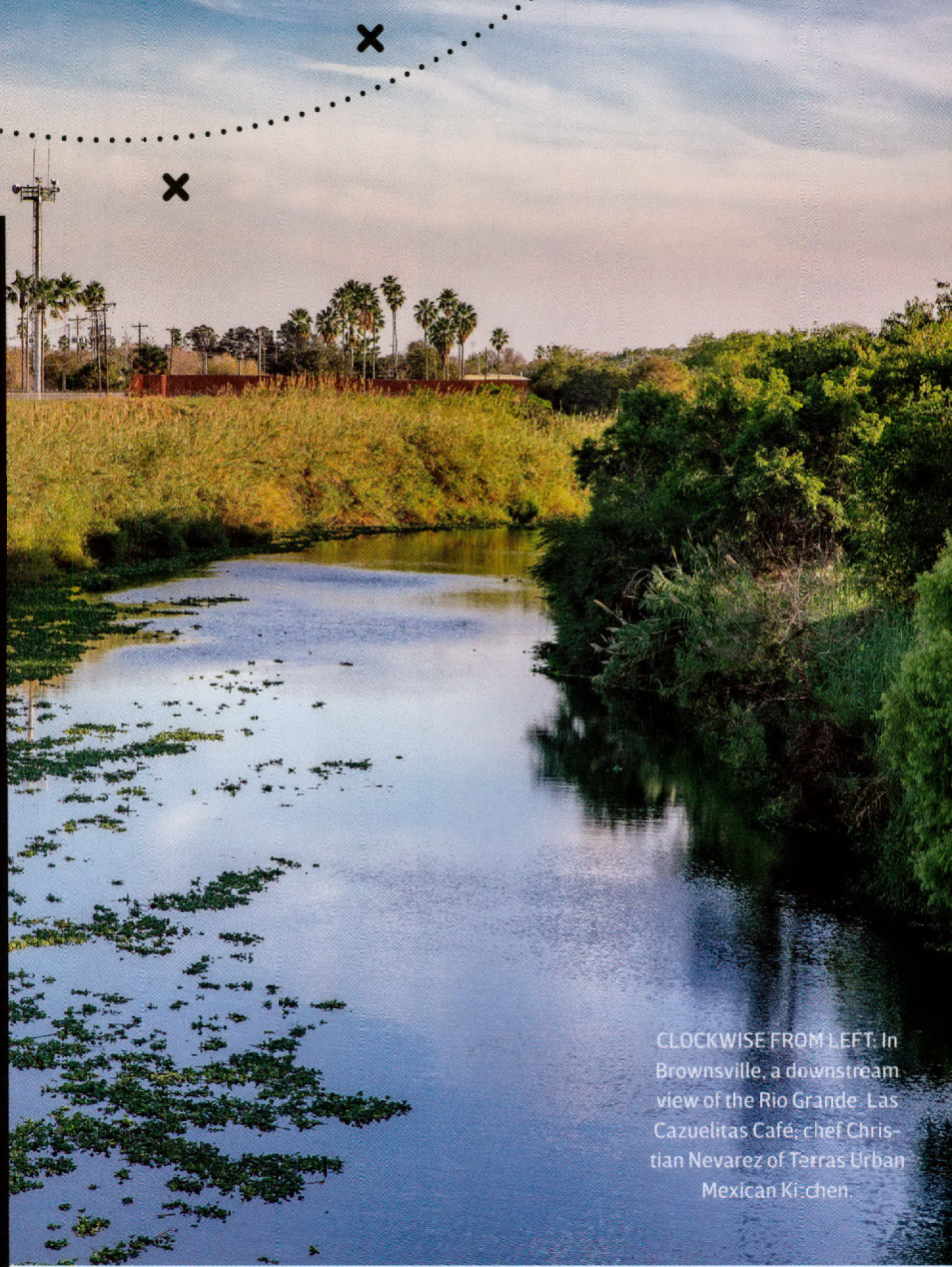
Hunter

Riley's Tavern: A historic bar for live music and beer on an outdoor patio, located on the backroads west of I-35. rileystavern.com

Brownsville

Terras Urban Mexican Kitchen: Chic eatery in historic downtown. terrasurbankitchen.com

For road-trip entertainment, the "Hank the Cowdog" podcast featuring Matthew McConaughey as Hank is a sure family pleaser. hankthecowdogpodcast.com



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: In Brownsville, a downstream view of the Rio Grande; Las Cazuelitas Café; chef Christian Nevarez of Terras Urban Mexican Kitchen.

Brownsville

We slept hard that night in one of the two cottages Hofmann rents out next door to Riley's and woke to our final southbound stretch: Interstate 37 and US 77 to Brownsville. For four hours we drove through expansive brushlands, passing towns such as Three Rivers, Kingsville, and Sarita, before pulling into a palm-lined neighborhood on the edge of Brownsville's downtown. Mariachi music played through open windows, and the air was sultry. We'd come a long way from our finger-numbing 17-degree mornings in the Panhandle.

Our first stop was the 1909 Hicks-Gregg House, a stately two-story home restored by Javier Salinas as a vacation rental. The home's expansive porch looks across three plant-filled lots close to Brownsville's downtown. In the bright sunroom, Salinas cranked up the player piano for us and spoke about what connects people in Brownsville.

"Historic preservation is important in Brownsville right now," Salinas said. "There is a curiosity that comes with seeing how we are bringing a building back to its natural glory. We also have young people establishing restaurants and bars. You can't help but want to get behind them as well. This



young entrepreneurial spirit mixed with historical preservation—it's a winning combination."

That night, we tasted the truth of Salinas' words at Terras Urban Mexican Kitchen, a hip eatery in the heart of downtown. Opened originally in 2016 by two friends, Christian Nevarez and Juan Flores, Terras expanded and reopened in 2020. With original brick walls, exposed beams, and sophisticated Mexican food, Terras would fit in with the trendiest restaurants of Mexico City.

We took in the scene as we dipped hot tortilla chips into the shrimp *molcajete*, a concoction of fresh-caught shrimp in a tangy sauce with squares of panela cheese. Even with the socially distanced tables, lively conversations

flowed from Spanish to English, filling the room. Amid a pandemic and economic hardship, there was still joy here.

The next morning over coffee, Nevarez and I talked about his hunger to start his own restaurant, his experience as a first-generation Mexican American, and how his mom, Sylvia, grew up in Matamoros and now proudly makes the "Mom's Cornbread" on the menu. Nevarez is a self-taught chef, but "always reading, trying to learn as much as possible about the science of food." When he explained the shrimp *molcajete* to me—how he roasts the tomatoes and blends them with the dried chipotle—the detail and passion with which he spoke was like poetry.

As we visited, an image of Erickson back on his Panhandle ranch flashed through my mind. In fact, I saw every person we'd met on this sojourn, going back to that first morning in Canadian with Kirkland in her "Red Dirt" hat.

Later that day, road-spent but exhilarated, we plopped down in the sand at Isla Blanca Park on South Padre Island. Feeling the warmth of the winter sunshine, we were revived by the revelations of our 1,500-mile journey. From our room at The Last Cowboy's Court to this beach, esmero had reigned.

"One and indivisible," as the Texas pledge states, is perhaps an unattainable ideal. But we found a powerful unifying thread linking each of the Texans we were lucky enough to meet. Its fibers are reverence and hard work. Despite their different stories, politics, skin colors, and surroundings, these Texans share a whole-hearted devotion to their callings and their neighbors. After a year spent at home, distracted by a pandemic and consumed with our own troubles, meeting them lifted us. Out on the road again, mingling safely with life-and-blood humans away from computer screens, we were reminded of the inherent goodness in people. We may not be "one and indivisible," but we're also not as different as we might think. 🐾



I Do
Love Me
Some,
Buc-ee's



*By Michael J. Mooney
Photographs by Dave Shafer*



How the convenience store—with its bathrooms, barbecue, and boundless choices—became the nexus of Texas



BRISKET SANDWICH: sliced or chopped, with or without pickles and onions.

Felicia lives in Poolville

and drove nearly an hour to get here. She brought her mother, Brenda, who lives in Jacksboro, and they decided to make a day of it. They're both wearing tennis shoes, sweaters, and glasses, and Felicia is carrying a blue, bell-shaped blown-glass wind chime on a rope. Price tag: \$24.99.

"You never know what you'll find here," Felicia tells me.

"Here" is a Buc-ee's on the west side of Interstate 35 in Denton, a crossroads in the middle of North Texas. It's late morning on a random Thursday, and Felicia and Brenda are wandering around, chatting as they examine the broad array of offerings: home décor, glassware, books, novelty shirts, knickknacks of all shapes and sizes. Felicia and Brenda come here a few times a year for anniversary gifts, birthday gifts, gifts for as-yet-unknown occasions. But this wind chime isn't a gift. It's for Felicia's backyard.

The mother-daughter duo also come here to spend time together. They normally buy something, or a few somethings, then eat. They usually get Buc-ee's barbecue sandwiches. Brenda prefers the pulled pork, Felicia the chopped brisket. Then—after the sights, the smells, the spending, the full stomach—they head home.

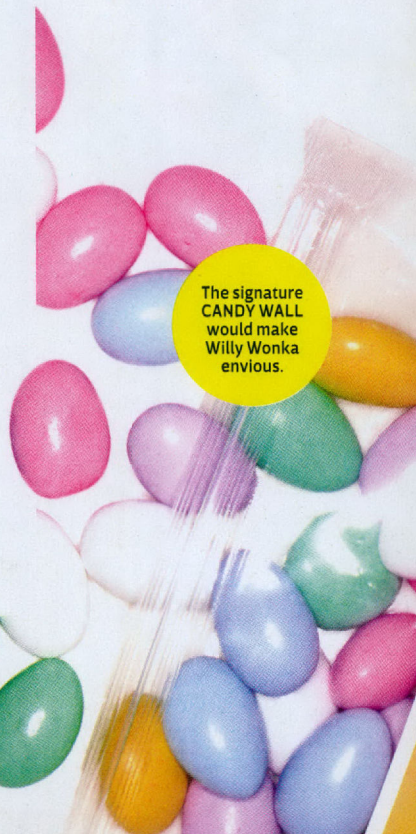
If you've never fallen under the trance of Buc-ee's in person, the concept might sound strange. It's ostensibly a gas station, known for its dozens of gas pumps (you almost never have to wait) and its reliably clean bathrooms (again, you almost never have to wait). It's a convenience store, but 15 or 20 times the size of regular convenience stores. There are dozens of different beers, dozens of different chips, about 20 different energy drinks, exactly 22 different kinds of fudge, and a 24-hour short-order kitchen. Picture a high-end flea market crossed with the nicest Fina station you've been to, then add a touch of truck-stop diner, and then give the whole place a slight theme-park vibe. Buc-ee the Beaver, the Buc-ee's mascot, is everywhere: cups, bags, shirts, hats, toys, and staring down from the wall over the



The ultimate Texas SODA FOUNTAIN features Dr Pepper and Big Red.



Assorted **BLMPER STICKERS** include phrases like "Beaver Be lever."



The signature **CANDY WALL** would make Willy Wonka envious.

OPENING SPREAD: A newly married couple stops at Buc-ee's prior to the airport for their honeymoon. THIS PAGE: Buc-ee's in Denton.



fountain drinks.

There are about 40 Buc-ee's locations, mostly in Texas, where the chain started in the early '80s. From the beginning, the mission has been to provide an everything-is-bigger-in-Texas alternative to the traditional, gritty road-trip convenience stores. Every Buc-ee's is next to a highway and in between the big cities, and each location has become a roadside beacon, summoning hundreds of thousands of people every day, at all hours of the day.

The founder of Buc-ee's, Arch "Beaver" Aplin III, says his goal was to create a happy, Texas version of Grand Central Station: grinning people, bustling in every direction. "At a travel hub, there can be a certain level of stress," the native Texan and Aggie tells me. "What I always look for is the faces, the mood, and that's what I use as much as anything to judge how we're doing."

For some, it's a stop to fill up the gas tank and maybe take a quick bathroom break. For others it's a destination, a wonderland worth planning a day around. It's the kind of place Texans tell out-of-staters they have to visit while they're here.

To understand the splendor of this bizarre bazaar, I wanted to study what makes Buc-ee's so alluring for all walks of people yet distinctly Texan. So, I decided to spend a day at one location, documenting 24 hours in the life of a Buc-ee's. I'd observe the many, many different items for sale. I'd talk to some of the people passing through. And I'd try to understand what undergirds this strange, modern mega-version of the old country store.



By early afternoon, Buc-ee's is lively. It feels like a stadium or an airport terminal. There's something happening in every direction. Men chopping meat behind a counter, constructing dozens of barbecue sandwiches at a time. Women slicing and packaging varieties of fudge and candied nuts. Travelers pouring through the doors in search of the perfect snack and drink—and maybe a quick dart through all the other stuff for sale here. Some are in the middle of long road trips. Some are running errands and decided to drop in.

Johnny Cash sings from the store's speakers, a cover of U2's "One."

By the front entrance, a tall, pear-shaped old man in wide denim overalls pays the cashier for at least half a dozen Bud Light Cheladas and a case of Keystone Light. A young couple in workout attire buys a fire pit and a log rack, totaling something around \$500. After checking out, they carefully load their new purchases into the back of their white Ford F-150. Then they pull onto the highway and disappear.

A college student named Alexis, wearing a leather jacket and yoga pants, talks into her phone as she stares at an entire wall of beef jerky options. "Let me call you back,"

she says, before moving in for a closer look at a few labels. She decides on one bag of "Bohemian Garlic" and one bag of "Steakhouse Beef." Then she goes back to her phone and back to her life.

Throughout the day, I talk with all sorts of people. It's a mix of ages, races, and everything else. It's blue-collar, white-collar, Democrat, Republican, rich, poor. There are people from out of state, people from other countries, and people from the apartments down the road.

A mom in an embroidered Texas sweatshirt is driving her adolescent son back home from a doctor's appointment in Dallas. They both sip from their fountain drinks as they contemplate their snack choices. "He *has* to stop," the mom says.

A man wearing creased Wranglers, a rodeo T-shirt, and a Cowboys-blue baseball cap with a large "214" across the front stands by the wall of fountain drinks, carrying a tall Styrofoam cup filled with cold Dr Pepper. He says he's on his way home from a casino in Oklahoma, and he seems to be in good spirits. "I did all right," he tells me with a subtle nod. "I came back with more than I left with, and that doesn't happen too often." As a small celebration, he came to Buc-ee's.

A just-off-the-clock construction worker waits for a fresh barbecue sandwich. A man visiting from Greece stops just long enough to say he doesn't have time to chat. A University of North Texas football player, offensive lineman Jacob Farrell, comes in for a large order of chicken tenders. Two women who work together came here to get snacks for their office but also end up buying two adult-size Buc-ee's onesies. The arms and pants are brown like beaver fur, and the hoodie includes the eyes, nose, and teeth of a beaver, plus a sewn-in red cap. Price: \$24.99.

The two women describe the sojourn to Buc-ee's as their "adventure of the day."



The billboards for Buc-ee's sometimes start hundreds of miles away. Each one features the illustrated, baseball cap-wearing mascot, Buc-ee the Beaver, and what is often some sort of cryptic joke or invitation. Seeing them over and over—with messages like "LET US PLAN YOUR NEXT POTTY" or "OMG! LOL... IT'S A BEAVER!"—calls to

From your first steps inside, you're hit with smells and colors. The store seems to stretch out into the horizon with endless possibilities. It's overwhelming, dizzying, titillating.

Warning! Caramel-laced corn puffs known as BEAVER NUGGETS are highly addictive.



It takes all kinds at Buc-ee's, including a casino winner who treated himself to a Dr Pepper and coworkers who scored onesies.





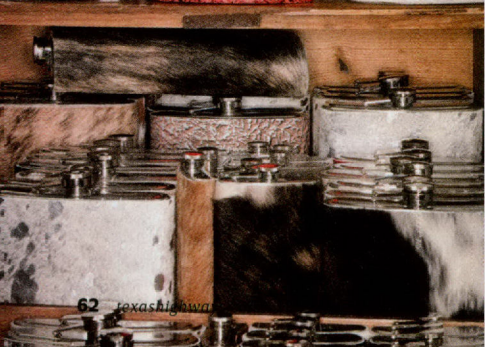
Buc-ee's sells an assortment of Buc-ee the Beaver-branded items and culinary delights like pickled quail eggs (above), plus merchandise from outside vendors (bottom left).



\$12.99



\$9.99



mind an old-timey mystery. As the miles of highway roll by, at some point you can't help but ask yourself: *What is this "Buc-ee's?"*

The answer: an intentionally overwhelming, astonishing temple of mass consumption.

Outside the building, greeting all comers, is a statue of Buc-ee. From your first steps inside, you're hit with smells (sugar-roasted pecans and cashews, mostly) and colors (red and yellow, mostly). The store seems to stretch out into the horizon with endless possibilities. It's overwhelming, dizzying, titillating.

Though there are now a few locations in other southern states, every Buc-ee's maintains its Texan-ness. It's not just the size. Nor is it just the barbecue—served under a sign that reads "Texas Round Up." It's the general feel of the place, the warm greetings patrons get from the couple dozen employees working at any given hour of the day, and the intuitively Texan wares for sale.

Here's a brief, very abridged list of things you can buy at Buc-ee's: gas, beer, ice, deer feeders, bars of "wild carrot" soap, wine glasses with a cheetah-print heart on the side, dozens of stuffed animals and children's books, Buc-ee's brand blueberry jalapeño jam, cookbooks, cutting boards, turquoise crosses, electric candles, fishing shirts, reasonably priced bottles of pinot noir (with tasting notes and pairing suggestions!), Buc-ee's socks, Buc-ee's pajamas, Buc-ee's towels, mugs that says HOT MESS, iron skillet, boot-shaped jars of local honey, watermelon saltwater taffy, and a \$400 painting of a bull. The most expensive item I find is a \$1,200 barbecue pit. The weirdest is the Buc-ee's brand pickled quail eggs.

The number of people at Buc-ee's in any given hour ebbs and flows, but there's always a handful of people no matter what time it is. After rush hour, several Buc-ee's patrons are wearing nametags or have office fobs dangling from their waists—people stopping in on the way home from work. There are fewer day-trippers and more commuters. The Buc-ee's staff tells me a couple people come in more than once a day. Buc-ee's has regulars.

At one point, the men's basketball team from the University of Texas at Tyler stops in. A woman and her dog stand by the kolache counter for a couple minutes. The dog seems

confused and periodically emits a few loud barks. A group of four women from Oklahoma are heading to Dallas for a three-day weekend extravaganza—there's no occasion—and have stopped to get booze and snacks. They're buying White Claws, Topo Chicos, cinnamon buns, and orange juice for the morning.

The store speakers play Willie Nelson's "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys" and Robert Earl Keen's "Feelin' Good Again."

Around 8:30 p.m., a young couple walks in. He's wearing a green, velvet tuxedo. She's in a white wedding dress with matching floral circlet. They just got married at a chapel in nearby Aubrey, they tell me, and now they're driving to the airport for their honeymoon. They decided they needed snacks for the trip, so here they are. Their first stop in life as husband and wife: Buc-ee's.

Around 10 p.m., the employees close the side entrances. Traffic slows, but there's still a steady flow, always at least 15 cars parked outside. Families on long trips with kids elated to see a penny reshaped into a Buc-ee's-branded smear of pressed copper. Couples heading home from a night of who knows what. Truckers moving up and down I-35.

By the middle of the night, the store is almost quiet. There are always at least a few people getting gas, but when there are only a handful of cars filling up, the colossal rows of pumps are so empty they seem ghostly in the night wind. No matter what the weather is like outside, though, inside it's always glowing LEDs across the massive ceiling. There's always popular music playing. There's always something to eat, something to drink, something to buy for yourself or for someone you love.

After so many hours here, I realize that's the allure of Buc-ee's: There's something for everyone, all the time. It's no coincidence that every Buc-ee's is along a highway. After enough miles of broken white line and billboards, it's impossible to resist something so ... *offbeat*. Buc-ee's breaks up the monotony of the road. It breaks up the monotony of life.

By 4:30 a.m., the brisket sandwich stations turn into breakfast sandwich stations. Construction crews trickle in, grabbing coffees, pastries, sandwiches for lunch later. The side entrances open back up, and the sun comes up on another day at Buc-ee's.

This majestic rest stop on the wide-open horizon might seem like a contrived modern version of the small-town general store, some ex-urban approximation of "country," but it's so much more. Buc-ee's is a nexus of a diverse Texas. Our world is so bifurcated—so consistent in its way—that there are many people we almost never see. But not at Buc-ee's, where the most interesting thing you can get is the fascinating view of a cross-section of humanity. And that's free of charge.

I guess it would be hard to fit all of that on a billboard, though. **L**

After enough miles of broken white line and billboards, it's impossible to resist something so ... offbeat. Buc-ee's breaks up the monotony of the road. It breaks up the monotony of life.

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PLATES



RUM PUNCH is the signature drink at tropical-themed Toucan Jim's.



JIM LACKEY (left) is the owner and namesake of Toucan Jim's, and his business partner, Mike Blackledge, helped construct the tropical furnishings.

Easy Breezy

A Hill Country bar and restaurant serves up a taste of island life

By Heather Brand

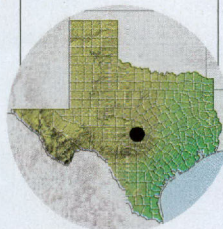
The Hill Country town of Center Point is about 200 miles from the Texas coast, but that didn't stop Jim Lackey from bringing the beach to his hometown near Kerrville. His restaurant and bar, Toucan Jim's, evokes a Caribbean vacation with island-inspired architecture and décor. A dry-docked boat and nautical flags greet guests at the entrance, and amid the lushly landscaped outdoor area, diners can sit beneath 27 different palapas, each emblazoned with the name of an exotic locale like Oahu, Jamaica, and Dominica.

Trips to the beaches of Belize, Mexico, and the Florida Keys inspired Lackey to open his restaurant in 2010. "The first time I saw that blue water, it reeled me in," he says. He aims to give his customers a sense of island time, providing a place to relax and unwind. "If it makes you feel that for five minutes, I've done my job," he says.

The restaurant's grounds offer a variety of amusements and amenities: an outdoor fire pit, a fake pillory for photo ops, a Bimini ringtoss game, and a watering station for customers' canines. Bands perform a variety of musical genres, including reggae, contemporary country, and Jimmy Buffet covers, on indoor and outdoor stages every Saturday night from March through October.

Lackey spent nearly three years building the establishment. The main structure used to be his childhood home. After inheriting the property, he knocked down walls and transformed the building from the ground up: The former living room is now the kitchen, and what was once a bedroom currently serves as the women's restroom. His business partner, Mike Blackledge—a carpenter and cabinetmaker—helped construct the palapas, tiki bar, and brightly painted furnishings. Lackey drew upon his own talents as a landscaper to tear up the St. Augustine grass and remake the

TOUCAN JIM'S
5814 SH 27,
Center Point,
830-634-2640;
toucanjims.com



lawn into a tropical oasis. He filled the approximately 1-acre site with crushed granite paths that wind through oleanders, palm trees, and other flora.

"You walk through those doors and you feel like you're in Mexico or Central America," says Scott Rouse, a regular customer. "You meet interesting people there who are drawn together by the quasi-tropical experience. The people there are more relaxed and friendly, like they're on vacation." Rouse especially likes to visit on Fridays, when the restaurant serves grilled tilapia; fried cod and catfish; and fish tacos.

In addition to such weekly specials, the standard menu offers crowd-pleasing fare like burgers, tacos, boneless wings, and pulled-pork sliders. Above all, Toucan Jim's is known for its specialty drinks: piña colodas, daiquiris, and other concoctions that provide a taste of the tropics. Because Center Point is a dry municipality, guests can only imbibe on the premises if they have a membership; however, the restaurant issues membership cards for free, and they are good for 99 years.

"We wanted a signature drink and settled on a rum punch," Lackey says. "We tried different drinks in the Florida Keys, Mexico, and Costa Rica, but we liked the one in Belize the best." It took six to nine months of taste-testing to figure out the recipe that most closely duplicated it. "We stretched it out five months longer than we needed to," he confesses with a sly smile. 🐼



RECIPE

Rum Punch

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ½ ounces Bacardi mango rum
- 1 ounce passion fruit juice from concentrate
- 4 ounces pineapple juice
- Splash of grenadine
- A maraschino cherry

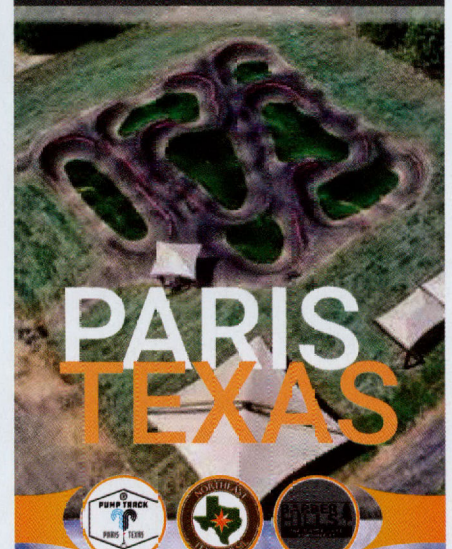
DIRECTIONS:

Stir all liquid ingredients and pour over ice in a 12-ounce glass. Top with a cherry.



A GROUP of regular customers enjoy the lush outdoor space.

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JOE ZAVALA
established Zavala's
Barbecue in 2016.

Early on a cold Saturday in February, Justin Earley and Steven Bailey stoke the fire and check briskets on the smoker.

A soft glow from the flame warms the faces of the co-owners of Bare Barbecue in Cleburne, near Fort Worth. It quickly dims as the smoker's firebox is shut to keep the temperature hot and even. As the first light of dawn peeks above the horizon, prep continues in the trailer as employees fill ramekins with homemade sauces and scoop banana pudding into half-pint containers.

By 2:30 p.m., when everything has sold out, the team is exhausted. Despite a notoriously slow cooking process, barbecue—as a business—is fast-paced. Some proprietors run a barbecue joint alongside full-time day jobs, and savvy customers demand consistent excellence. But the long hours and risks are worth it for pitmasters who are passionate about craft barbecue.

While craft barbecue is now the standard in major Texas cities, the suburbs and small towns still have plenty of room for barbecue entrepreneurs to make their marks.

**ZAVALA'S
BARBECUE**

421 W. Main St.,
Grand Prairie,
817-330-9061;
zavalasbarbecue.com

BARE BARBECUE

904 W. Chambers St.,
Cleburne,
817-648-7014;
barebarbecue.com

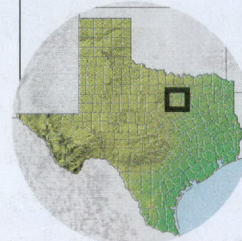
**GOLDEE'S
BARBECUE**

4645 Dick Price Road,
Fort Worth,
817-480-4131;
goldeesbbq.com

Getting Crafty

After sufficiently saturating the metropolises, craft barbecue expands to suburbs and small towns

By Amanda Ogle



A BRISKET SANDWICH
with housemade chimichurri sauce (left) and a smoked burger with caramelized onions and Thousand Island dressing from Bare Barbecue.



“A lot of people think craft barbecue is everywhere, but it’s not,” Earley says. “Austin and the big cities might be running out of room but the smaller towns would love to have a craft barbecue place.”

What sets craft barbecue apart from run-of-the-mill restaurants are high-quality meat (typically from local farms), an obsession with technique, scratch-made sauces and rubs, and innovative recipes that bring new flavors to classic sides. The interest in creativity and pursuit of greatness has inspired folks to take their backyard hobby to the professional level.

A full-time CPA, Earley first got into barbecue around 2015 by experimenting on a backyard smoker and watching video tutorials. After entering and winning a few barbecue competitions, he began selling his ‘cue to family and friends, who wanted to purchase it for holidays and special occasions. In 2018, Earley partnered with his brother-in-law, Bailey, and the duo held pop-ups at nearby breweries. After recognizing an untapped market for craft barbecue in

Cleburne, they opened Bare Barbecue as a food trailer in July 2019. “There were the old-school joints that’ve been open for decades, but for the style of barbecue we like to serve, we didn’t see that here,” Earley says.

Joe Zavala, co-owner of Zavala’s Barbecue in Grand Prairie, between Dallas and Fort Worth, began in a similar fashion. In the summer of 2015, he snagged an old smoker from his father-in-law and fixed it up to cook brisket for a Fourth of July party. Zavala continued to practice and perfect his barbecue, gaining knowledge from his father-in-law and his own barbecue-loving dad along the way. In early 2016, Zavala’s Barbecue opened on weekends as a side business doing deliveries and pop-ups before finding a brick-and-mortar spot in downtown Grand Prairie in 2019. “It’s hard work, but it’s a drug,” says Zavala, who also works full-time as an IT consultant. “Anybody who has a competitive background and a passion for barbecue wants to perfect what they’re doing.”

“A lot of people think craft barbecue is everywhere, but it’s not. Austin and the big cities might be running out of room, but the smaller towns would love to have a craft barbecue place.”

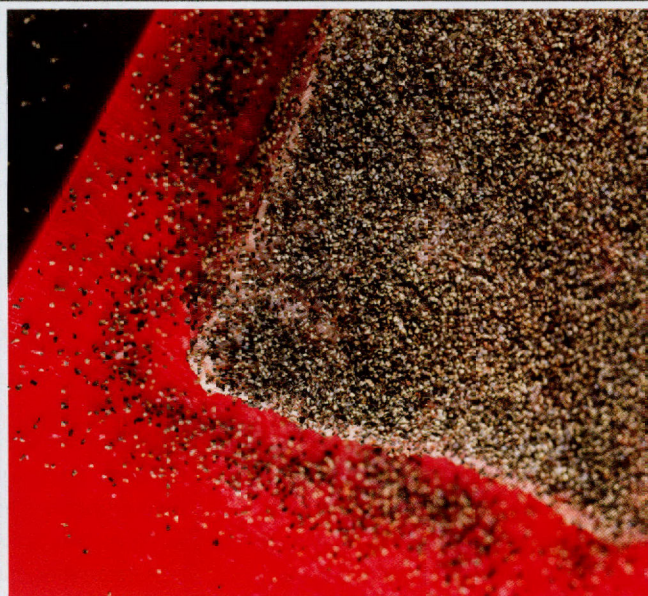
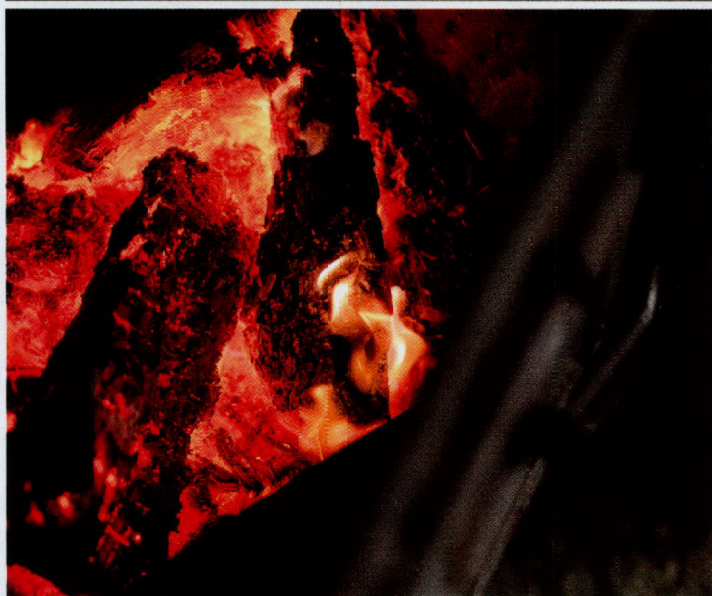
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FROM TOP: Bare Barbecue co-owners Justin Earley and Steven Bailey opened their trailer in Cleburne in 2019. Zavala's fire pit and trimmed brisket.

The owners of Goldee's Barbecue—Lane Milne, Eylan Taylor, Jr., Tony White, Nupohn Inthanousay, and Jalen Beard—are able to dedicate themselves full-time to their restaurant located on the outskirts of Fort Worth. The 20-somethings gained experience working at some of Austin's best-known joints like Franklin Barbecue and Valentina's before opening their own place in early 2020. They brought big-city know-how and efficiency to their new business. "We

all learned different ways to do things, which taught us how to cook better and faster, how to run service, and how to keep organized," Milne says.

The last year has been challenging for many small businesses, but for brand-new barbecue joints the combination of COVID-19 and a devastating winter storm proved downright discouraging.

At the onset of the pandemic, Zavala's implemented preordering and pickup options, but as time went on and

“It’s hard work, but it’s a drug,” says Joe Zavala, owner of Zavala’s Barbecue. “Anybody who has a competitive background and a passion for barbecue wants to perfect what they’re doing.”

COVID-19 showed little signs of letting up, sales declined. “There wasn’t a play-book on what to do,” Zavala says. So he began to drum up interest by offering burger nights, fajita Thursdays, and taco nights to increase revenue. By January 2021, sales had increased, but February’s historic winter storm caused a pipe to burst, damaging the sheetrock and HVAC system at Zavala’s, and forcing it to close. It reopened in April.

For Bare Barbecue, the pandemic helped draw in more customers, but business slowed during a second wave of COVID-19. The restaurant switched to preordering with drive-thru pickup, then transitioned to offering preorders and walk-in service, separating the two options with different time slots. For its part, Goldee’s leaned into its educational offerings during the pandemic to bring in extra income, hosting classes on sausage making, fire maintenance, meat trimming, and seasoning.

One advantage small-town craft barbecue joints have is a sense of community with their customers, who aren’t just strangers or tourists traveling through, but neighbors. “If I didn’t have a barbecue business, I’d be sitting around with my friends cooking on Friday nights,” Zavala says. “And through barbecue I’m still able to do that, but also cook for the community and have a place where everyone likes to gather.”



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By MM Pack



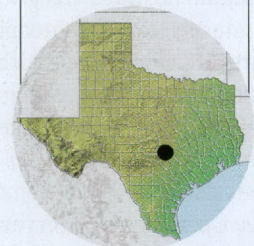
BARTON SPRINGS
Mill owner James Brown shows off his vintage seed cleaner.

Set among the restaurants, breweries, and wedding venues of Dripping Springs is an old-fashioned yet newfangled grain mill. Owner James Brown named it Barton Springs Mill to honor two 19th-century mills powered by the waters of Austin’s renowned Barton Springs. Although those historic mills are long gone, their legacy lives on with BSM’s heritage grains, which are grown in Texas and milled in the Hill Country.

Brown, a Houston-area native whose family owned a farm in Madisonville, began baking bread in 2016 and soon became obsessed with the art and science of it. Even though he might have terrific techniques, ideal equipment, the purest water, and the finest sourdough starter, he concluded that without excellent flour he could never make the best bread. “Flour is not flour is not flour,” he says. “Giving a baker only commercial white flour to work with is like giving a painter a palette with only one color.” There are hard wheats and soft wheats that vary in protein content. Different flours can have different textures, colors, and flavors—buttery, sweet, bitter, nutty.

Seeking a wider variety of flours, Brown discovered sources across the

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U.S., but not in Texas. He found other bakers and chefs around the state who also desired fresh, flavorful, and organically grown grain products. He learned that, despite a long history of wheat farming in Texas, no one was growing landrace and heirloom grains because commercial demand—dwindling since the 1930s—had essentially disappeared. (Landrace grains are domesticated, locally adapted, and traditional; heirloom generally refers to open-pollinated, pre-1930s seeds.)

A less determined person might balk at these obstacles, but Brown, ready for a career change, jumped right in.

Before becoming a miller, Brown was a professional conductor and musician, specializing in early music, like medieval, Renaissance, and early baroque. He plays viola da gamba, piano, pipe organ, and more recently, banjo, guitar, and mandolin. He performed around the country and was pursuing a PhD in historical musicology at City University of New York when 9/11 changed his plans. He returned to Texas to continue his music career, serving as music director for Austin's First Presbyterian Church and managing the St. Cecilia Music Series, which brought distinguished early-music virtuosos to Austin, for 16 years. Prior to his career in music, he earned a culinary degree from the Art Institute of Houston, but he eventually decided against that professional path. "I didn't have the right kind of creative imagination to be a chef," he explains.

Ultimately, Brown returned to food. When starting Barton Springs Mill, he worked with millers around the country to learn the ropes, including Glenn Roberts of the famed Anson Mills in South Carolina. He even sold some musical instruments to finance purchasing a stone mill. He extensively researched and collected seed stock from Canada and the western U.S. and began partnerships with Texas farmers to grow the different varieties. He loans them seed and buys their harvests.

Brown has rotating partnerships with 11 growers, a vast majority of which are in

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Oaxacan Green corn; various grain bunches hang on the mill's wall; grain drops from the hopper into the mill.



“Giving a baker only commercial white flour to work with is like giving a painter a palette with only one color.”

Texas. “I want to take as much responsibility as possible off the farmers,” he says. “They bring grain straight from the fields; we do the rest.”

Even without assurance that his vision was a viable business venture, Brown's bold moves paid off. Barton Springs Mill opened in 2017 and continues to thrive. The 20 grains—selected for their flavors and colors, and milled into a variety of textures—provide feasts for the eyes, imagination, and taste buds. Among them are the fancifully named Rouge de Bordeaux and Turkey Red wheats, golden Oberkölmer spelt, Mancan buckwheat, Hopi Blue, Bloody Butcher Red, and Oaxacan Green corn. Rouge de Bordeaux is recommended for breads, cookies, muffins, and pancakes, while the Oaxacan Green corn is a great option for grits, polenta, and tortillas.

Ten employees work in the 18,500-square-foot building that houses two stone mills from Austria, a hammer mill, a seed cleaner, and a sifter. In addition to 370 restaurants and bakeries, Texas breweries and distilleries are customers as well, purchasing corn grist and malted grains from the company. The business also includes an education center for classes and workshops and an independent bakery.

While working at Dai Due restaurant in Austin, baker Abby Love fell hard for the mill's flours, and she adapted her recipes to feature them. Today, she is



the proprietor of Abby Jane Bakeshop, which opened in January at the mill. She produces artisan breads, pizzas, and pastries using only BSM flours. A large window between the bakery and the milling room allows customers to view the process while enjoying the baked results.

Stephanie McClenny of Confituras Little Kitchen, an Austin biscuit-and-jam shop, uses a custom blend of BSM Sonora and Marquis flours and all-purpose flour. "It all comes together for the perfect biscuit—the texture, flavor, and style of biscuit stand up to butter and jam as well as sausage and gravy," McClenny says.

Brown isn't looking to create an empire—he wants to maintain a sustainable business that supports Texas farmers and fulfills demand from Texas consumers. "I've let the enterprise guide me where it needs to go, but I want to keep things as slow as I can without turning customers away," he says. "Every order delivered outside the state contains information about similar mills in that customer's region. I've got all the business I need in Texas, and I want people to support their local millers."

Brown sees a continuum from his musical life to his current role as miller. He explains that striving for perfection is a goal in both arenas, as is constructive communication. The coordinating skills needed to conduct a musical ensemble aren't so different from those required to lead a multifaceted business that encompasses interactions with growers, millers, bakers, brewers, distillers, and home cooks. "You work with people who have different talents, and we are all a part of a larger creative enterprise," he says.

Brown draws another connection between music and flour. These days, he plays banjo, mandolin, and guitar for recreation, and he thinks about the early 20th-century musicians who were sponsored by Texas flour mills to advertise their products on the radio. "Bob Wills and the Light Crust Doughboys? Pappy O'Daniel's Flour Hour?" he says. "I feel like I might be channeling some of that." 🐾

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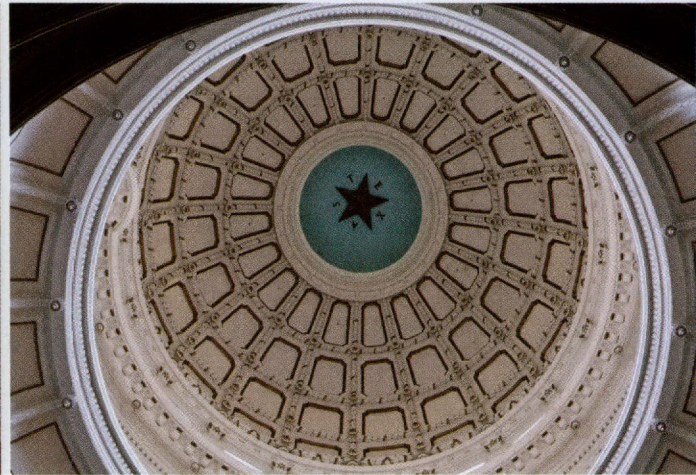
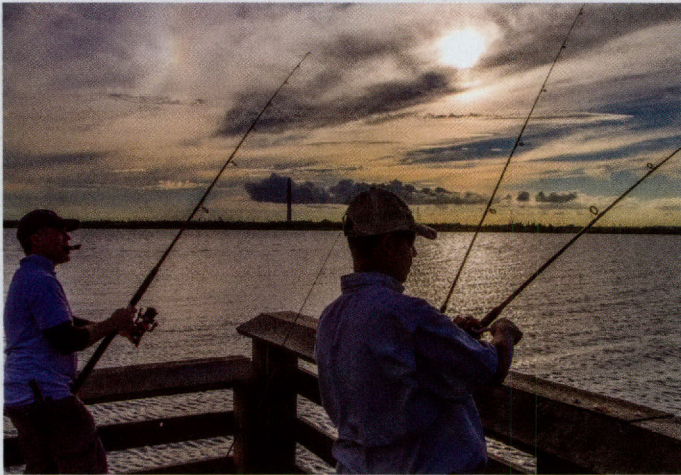
- Badu Park
- Deer Capital of Texas
- Enchanted Rock National Park
- Grenwolge Park
- Lantex Theater
- Llano County Red Top Jail
- Llano Railroad Yard
- Llano River Golf Course
- Llano Courthouse
- Roy B. Inks Bridge
- Shakedown Street

Things to Love!

- Llano County Courthouse • Ford & Main Street
- Rock N' Art Pocket Park • 803 Berry Street
- Historic 1927 Lantex Theatre • 113 West Main
- Shakedown Street • Alley on Main Street
- The Red Top Jail • Grenwolge Park
- The Stone Throne • Grenwolge Park
- The Hand • Grenwolge Park
- Deer carved into the tree • Grenwolge Park
- Roy Inks Bridge & The Llano River
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- 1 Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau
- 2 Admiral Nimitz Foundation
- 3 Andrews Chamber of Commerce & Convention & Visitors Bureau
- 4 Bandera County Convention & Visitors Bureau
- 5 Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau
- 6 Blanco Chamber of Commerce
- 7 Boerne Convention & Visitors Bureau
- 8 Bullock Texas State History Museum
- 9 Cedar Park Tourism
- 10 City of Gonzales
- 11 City of Harlingen Convention & Visitors Bureau
- 12 City of Huntsville
- 13 City of Llano-Community Development
- 14 City of Port Isabel
- 15 Cleburne Chamber of Commerce
- 16 Corsicana Convention & Visitors Center
- 17 Cuero Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture
- 18 Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden
- 19 Discover Odessa
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- 24 Galveston Island Section
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With everything Galveston has to offer, the best part is there's no pressure to see and do it all at once. When you're here, you're on Island Time. For more information, head to visitgalveston.com.



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GalvestonNavalMuseum.com
409.770.3195

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TheBryanMuseum.com
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Moody Mansion

MoodyMansion.org
 409.762.7668

Moody Mansion, 2618 Broadway, is the remarkably restored and furnished 1895 registered national historic landmark home of the late W.L. Moody, Jr. He was one of America's wealthiest entrepreneurs during the early 1900s, establishing over 50 businesses, including insurance, banking, hotels and ranching. Open for self-guided audio tours 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, and weekend behind-the-scenes guided tours by reservation.



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Find Your Beach

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While Seawall beaches are open year-round, the island's largest public beach parks – Stewart Beach and East Beach are open all summer long, offering a variety of special amenities.

Visitors to the beach parks can also take advantage of restrooms, showers, beach umbrella and chair rentals, volleyball courts, children's playground, snack bars and other concessions, including sandcastle building lessons, horseback riding and helicopter tours.

TEXANA

A Trailer-Full of Memories

Vintage RV enthusiasts follow a long line of inventive campers

By Pam LeBlanc

RV CAMPERS relax at Eisenhower State Park on Lake Texoma in 1975.



9643 Eisenhower State Park near Denison,

On a warm weekend last October, several dozen vintage travel trailers filled the spaces at Leisure Resort

Campground & RV Park along the San Marcos River in Fentress. Some were shaped like canned hams; others resembled sleek silver bullets. One pumpkin-colored trailer was parked alongside a matching bright orange pickup truck.

Participants in the Texas Vintage Trailer Club's rally gathered outside their campers to swap stories—about the thrill of spotting a promising junker rusting away in a farmer's field; or the frustration of restorations gone awry. They peeked inside one another's campers to admire the tricked-out features, such as a working fireplace or avocado-colored shag carpeting. They clanked their drinks and fired up their grills, content to revel and reminisce among these rolling artifacts of the traveling life.

"I grew up in the 1970s, and it's just the nostalgia that attracts us to this," said Cindy Quimby, of Buda. She and her husband, Jeff Quimby, held court in the shade of a pecan tree where they'd parked their turquoise-and-white Shasta Loflyte trailer, a 1970 beauty nicknamed Blue Angel. "I look back on building memories with my dad and mom," she said. "Those were the best bonding times with my siblings."

People have been camping in their cars almost since they started driving

The underlying allure of recreational vehicles has been the appeal of self-contained travel and the romance of the open road.



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The Jack Sisemore Traveland RV Museum in Amarillo

Amarillo RV salesman Jack Sisemore made his first RV back in 1945. Then a teenager, he cut the trunk off his family's Oldsmobile and built a sleeping platform of 4-by-4 boards. Along with his parents, brother, aunt, and uncle, he set out for Yellowstone National Park, pulling over at night to cook dinner and sleep.

The trip foreshadowed what became a lifelong obsession for Sisemore, who's now 80. He owned a gas station starting in 1961, and in 1974, bought his first RV. In order to afford it, he rented the camper out when he wasn't using it. That went well, so he bought another camper, and then another, and within the same year, he owned six rental units. Then he opened a dealership, located on Interstate 27 in Amarillo.

Jack's son, Trent Sisemore, serves as general manager of Jack Sisemore Traveland dealership. About 10 years ago, the duo opened the Jack Sisemore RV Museum to display their collection of campers, trailers, and motorcycles from the 1930s to 1970s.

"In the 1980s, we began to realize some of the older RVs were just going away," Trent Sisemore says. "We started keeping the unusual ones. Then we began to restore them, mainly for posterity's sake. One day we said, 'Why don't we open it up and let people go through it while they're waiting for their RVs to get worked

on?' All of a sudden, it took on a life of its own."

The museum was a hit. "People came from everywhere—100 to 150 people a day," Sisemore recalls.

The collection includes nearly 30 different RVs, including motor homes and various campers. One of the most popular exhibits is a 1935 Airstream Torpedo—the oldest Airstream still in existence and one of only 20 ever made. The museum also features the first Itasca motor home ever built, serial No. 1; an FMC Motorcoach with a built-in blender owned by Max Factor Jr., president of the cosmetics company of the same name; and the Flexible Bus used in the 2006 comedy movie *RV*, starring Jeff Daniels and Robin Williams.

Mostly, though, the museum preserves the relics of Americans' fascination with travel—and our collective dream to explore.

The Jack Sisemore RV Museum has been closed during the pandemic and plans to reopen this June in a new location—14211 Interstate 27, between Amarillo and Canyon. The new museum will also display restored cars from the Amarillo Motor Sports Hall of Fame. Entry is free. Call ahead. 806-358-4891; rvmuseum.net

FROM LEFT: At the Sisemore Museum in Amarillo, a 1946 Kit teardrop trailer; a 2004 photo of Padre Island National Seashore.



them. At a 1910 car show in New York, automobile maker Pierce-Arrow unveiled the Touring Landau, which had a back seat that opened into a bed, a chamber pot for a toilet, and a sink that folded out of a front seat. Five years later, Roland Conklin, a financier and motorbus company president in Huntington, New York, modified a bus into a 25-foot double-decker motor home with appliances and a rooftop garden. He and his wife, Mary Conklin, set off in their "Gypsy Van" for a two-month voyage to San Francisco, making headlines across the country.

Soon, outdoorsy types all over were making their own recreational vehicles by attaching canvas tents to stowable wooden frames and creating built-in spaces to cook. Interest among average Americans grew, and by the mid-1920s, detachable trailers gained popularity as motorists used them for gear storage and as a sleeping space at night.

California camping enthusiast Wally Byam designed the first shiny metal Airstream in the late 1920s. Around the same time, Arthur Sherman, a bacteriologist and inventor from Michigan, experi-

VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



The Politics of Posterity

AUSTIN, MAY 22, 1971

This May marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the LBJ Presidential Library at the University of Texas. A diverse group of dignitaries, from President Richard Nixon to actor Gregory Peck (not pictured), gathered for the dedication. “We have papers from 40—some very turbulent—years of public service, and we put them all over here in one place, for friends and foes to judge, to approve or to disapprove,” Johnson remarked. “I do not know how this period will later be regarded in the years to come. But that’s really not the point. This library will show the facts.” Johnson’s wife, Lady Bird Johnson, was a driving force behind the library, which was the first of its kind to be set on a college campus. When visiting the four existing presidential libraries, she noted that scholars came in one door and the public another, and she made sure such a division didn’t exist at the LBJ Library. Over the years, the library has welcomed millions of visitors for exhibits chronicling the Johnsons’ life and times. The library is currently closed due to the pandemic; visit lbjlibrary.org for updates. **L**

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

Photo: Courtesy LBJ Presidential Library

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THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

Brady

A tiny town with a Texas-size heart

BY CHET GARNER



Brady, a small Hill Country town smack dab in the middle of the state, claims to be the genuine "Heart of Texas." I can believe it; Brady is exactly what you'd want our collective heart to be—full of friendly folks, country music, piles of barbecue, and plenty of stars at night.

Geographic Center of Texas

I'm not sure how anybody finds the "center" of something as oddly shaped as Texas, but a group of surveyors did just that and noted the spot in 1963 with a marker on US 377, about 20 miles north of town. Though the actual point is on private property, its energy radiates for miles. I've been told if you come on a night when the stars are biggest and brightest, the ghost of Sam Houston will visit. Whether or not that's true, the marker is a must-see.

Historic Square

This small-town square is full of shops and remnants of the past. Don't miss taking a selfie with the "Heart of Texas" statue on the courthouse lawn. Step into Evridges Furniture to ogle 40,000 square feet of décor, including the largest spiral staircase and stained-glass dome in Central Texas. Finally, the curiosities at D and J's Good Ole Days store include everything from prosthetic eyes to taxidermied blowfish for sale.

Heart of Texas Museum

Located inside the old jail, this historic museum offers a creepy yet cool way to walk through the county's history and see criminal evidence as artifacts, like the tip of a finger bitten off in a jailhouse brawl. The bottom floor is packed with stories, but save time to walk through the iron cells on the upper floors. They sure made me happy to have my freedom.

Behind the jail is the Curtis Field control tower and a large military exhibit that stands as a tribute to the 10,000 pilots who were trained for combat in Brady during World War II.

Mac's Bar-B-Q

Brady loves its barbecue, especially around Labor Day when it hosts the World Championship BBQ Goat Cookoff. The barbecue at Mac's will hit the spot any time of year and sometimes includes smoked goat meat as a special. The moist brisket and tangy sauce are incredible, as are the burgers and chicken-fried steak. You could say it's "baaaaaaaaad" to the bone—as bad as my jokes.

Country Music Museum

At the center of many Texans' hearts is a love for country music. That's certainly true for Tracy Pitcox, who started as a country radio DJ and now curates one of the nation's best collections of country music memorabilia. This museum displays mementos from over 125 country music stars, including Bob Wills' fiddle, Merle Haggard's shirt, and George Strait's hat. My favorite artifact was Jim Reeves' tour bus, "Big Blue," with an all-blue interior and wood paneling. It made me realize that I definitely need a "Big Daytrippin'" bus of my own.

**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 Brady episode visit thedaytripper.com.
Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chettripper.*

parks started adding larger parking spaces and better electrical and septic hookups for RV campers. "Instead of accommodating something 6 feet wide by 24 feet long, they had to look at accommodating a fifth wheel up to 45 feet long and as wide as 16 feet with pull-outs," Elam says.

The popularity of travel trailers has ebbed and flowed through the years, spurred by such events as the development of the country's highway system and, most recently, interest in camping as a safe recreational activity during the coronavirus pandemic. The current trend of families pulling up stakes and documenting "#vanlife" on the road makes for compelling social media, but it's nothing new. Right after World War II, RVs ran in short supply as people bought them as an affordable housing alternative.

All along, the underlying allure of recreational vehicles has been the appeal of self-contained travel and the romance of the open road. It's an intrigue well known to Trent Sisemore, manager of Jack Sisemore Traveland, the Amarillo RV dealership founded by his father that also has an RV museum [see sidebar on Page 82].

"I love the history of America and the history of the open road and the culture that went along with that—a freedom," Trent Sisemore says. "It's about accidental exploration."

Back at the Texas Vintage Trailer Club rally in Fentress, Yvonne and George Evans of Van Alstyne show off "Lacey Pearl," their refurbished, mermaid-themed 1967 Shasta Starflyte trailer. The couple spent 10 months gutting and rebuilding the trailer, including the addition of a tiny fireplace, stained-glass windows, a copper sink, pearl shell tile, and a microwave oven. "We just took it to the next level," Yvonne says.

The first RV aficionados didn't have such amenities in their own custom creations. Still, when today's vintage RV enthusiasts hit the road, they're seeking the same thing as people 100 years ago—adventure. **L**



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‘El Rey de Texas’

Throughout his celebrated career, Flaco Jiménez has let his accordion do the talking

By Joe Nick Patoski

Leonardo “Flaco” Jiménez is San Antonio music royalty. Known as “El Rey de Texas” for his mastery of the accordion, the 82-year-old comes from a pioneering family of conjunto, the soul music of South Texas Mexican Americans. His father, Santiago, was among the first conjunto accordionists to record in the mid-1930s. The musicians of the Jiménez family, including Flaco’s grandfather, Patricio, developed their sound by listening to the bands at German, Polish, and Czech dances around San Antonio and New Braunfels in the early 20th century. They interpreted what they heard into something completely different. Three of Flaco’s brothers, Santiago Jr., Eddie, and Ruben, are also accomplished accordionists.

Flaco, a lifelong San Antonio resident, was a young lion of conjunto, picking up the accordion at age 7 and making his mark in the late 1950s with his first bands,

“San Antonio is a music city. Like Nashville is to country and New Orleans is to jazz, San Antonio is to conjunto. The whole city has a musical groove.”

Leonardo Jiménez y sus Caporales, and Los Caminantes. Rail-thin and dashing, he earned the nickname of Flaco, or Skinny. In the early 1970s, roots rocker Doug Sahm recruited Flaco to play on the album *Doug Sahm and Band*, setting the accordionist on a nontraditional path far beyond his hometown. His crossover success culminated in the 1990s as a member of the Tex-Mex supergroup the Texas Tornados with Sahm, Freddy Fender, and Augie Meyers.

Winner of five Grammy Awards, Jiménez has toured the world and played on more than 100 albums with a “Who’s Who” of musical giants, from the Rolling Stones, to Emmylou Harris, to Dwight Yoakam. The honors continued this spring when the Library of Congress added his 1992 album, *Partners*, to its National Recording Registry, a collection of “audio treasures worthy of preservation for all time.” But Flaco remains a San Anto homie at heart.

TH: How do you describe conjunto music to the unfamiliar?

FJ: It's slang, for like a conjunction of three instruments: the accordion, the *bajo sexto* 12-string guitar, and a slap bass. It was like a trio, you know. *Conjunto* is Spanish for group, or a collection. They are conjunct. That's where conjunto comes from.

TH: What is the universal appeal of conjunto?

FJ: We call it *musica alegre*—happy music. It's happy, danceable music. Who doesn't love happy music?

TH: What have you been up to during the pandemic?

FJ: I've been enjoying my time at home with my wife and family. When COVID hit, all the bookings dried up. Most everything has been canceled. I've done some Zoom performances and recorded a music video at my home with Michael Quintanilla [a San Antonio media personality], for his Gridiron show, but that's been it. I've also been helping promote the Tacos Jiménez food truck started by my son Leonard and his wife, Gilda.

TH: Any new projects?

FJ: Before the coronavirus, I was still playing with Max and Josh [Baca, the leaders of the band Los Texmaniacs]. We've done some gigs with Johnny Nicholas at Hill Top Cafe, his restaurant outside Fredericksburg. And we're finishing recording an album with Augie Meyers, Nunie Rubio, Speedy Sparks, and Ernie Durawa [the core surviving members of the Texas Tornados, performing as the Tornado Legends]. The recording studio has been closed because of COVID, and we're waiting for it to reopen so we can finish the tracks.

TH: What's the key to playing conjunto music on the accordion?

FJ: The way to play the instrument is as simple as possible, so people can understand. A lot of accordionists are showing off too much. It's like putting too much sugar in your coffee. I tell the kids that you can't win a Grammy just because

you think you deserve it. A lot of the young accordionists think Grammys are a prize in a cereal box. They're wondering, "Where's mine?" They don't understand the work you have to put in to earn an honor like that.

TH: Who are some younger accordion players you enjoy?

FJ: Josh Baca and Dwayne Verheyden—they're examples of good players. [Verheyden is a 29-year-old from The Netherlands.] Dwayne's dad and mom took him to see me when I was touring in Holland with Ry Cooder. He was a young kid. A few years later, I hear this kid playing and said, "Oh man, it's me playing the accordion. He plays my same phrasing." He knows how to speak real good Spanish now. So we converse in Spanish, and I tell him, "I'm sorry Dwayne, but I'm having a little problem speaking Dutch." But then he says, "*No te preocupes, Flaco. Hablame en español.*"

TH: What type of accordion do you like to play?

FJ: The same instrument I've always played—a Hohner Corona II Classic. It's a solid three-row model. My father and grandfather played a simpler one-row button accordion. [In 2009, Hohner began producing a Corona II Flaco Jiménez Signature model.] There are lots of good accordions being made these days. Gabbanelli in Houston makes very good accordions too.

TH: You're known for your expertise on the accordion's inner workings—an instrument doctor of sorts.

FJ: If someone in the recording studio breaks a reed or needs their accordion tuned, I'll help out. But I don't repair accordions, per se.

TH: Conjunto is a traditional style. Yet, you seemed to consciously break away from 'puro conjunto.'

FJ: I like to explore things. I don't like to be a one-track guy. Early on, I decided to play different kinds of music. I like all kinds of music—country, rock 'n' roll. I wanted to cross over, and I got lucky. In

the early 1970s, I started working with Doug Sahm, Ry Cooder, and Peter Rowan. Those three are people greatly respected by other musicians. Word spread fast. Pretty soon I'm playing with Dwight Yoakam and the Rolling Stones.

TH: When you're recording a session with someone like *The Mavericks* or *Stephen Stills*, how do you prepare?

FJ: I improvise when I'm recording. I don't read charts. I never play the same. I just listen and try to figure out what to play. I've got different phrases I like to use. You have to get the feel of the music they're playing.

TH: San Antonio is known for the Alamo and the River Walk, but beyond that, what makes the city different?

FJ: What I like about San Antonio is that it's not an industrial city like Chicago, LA, or Houston. Those cities are too industrial. San Antonio is a music city. Like Nashville is to country and New Orleans is to jazz, San Antonio is to conjunto. The whole city has a musical groove. The Tejano Conjunto Festival in Rosedale Park in May and the plazas, whenever there is music, are good places to see conjunto.

TH: We've talked in English, but Spanish is your first language. How do you prefer to communicate?

FJ: I'm not good at speeches. People that know me know I let my accordion talk for me. **L**

Flaco Jiménez has recorded or played on more than 100 albums since he was a teenager. To hear his signature Tex-Mex conjunto style, listen to the 1990 album, *Ay Te Dejo en San Antonio y Más!* The title track won Jiménez a Grammy Award in 1986 for Best Mexican American Performance. [facebook.com/flacojimenezofficial](https://www.facebook.com/flacojimenezofficial)

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