

# TEXAS

HIGHWAYS™

THE  
TRAVEL  
MAGAZINE  
OF TEXAS

## SACRED SPACES



THE SUBLIME AWAITS AT TRANSCENDENT  
DESTINATIONS ACROSS THE STATE



Calera Chapel  
in Balmorhea

FEBRUARY 2023

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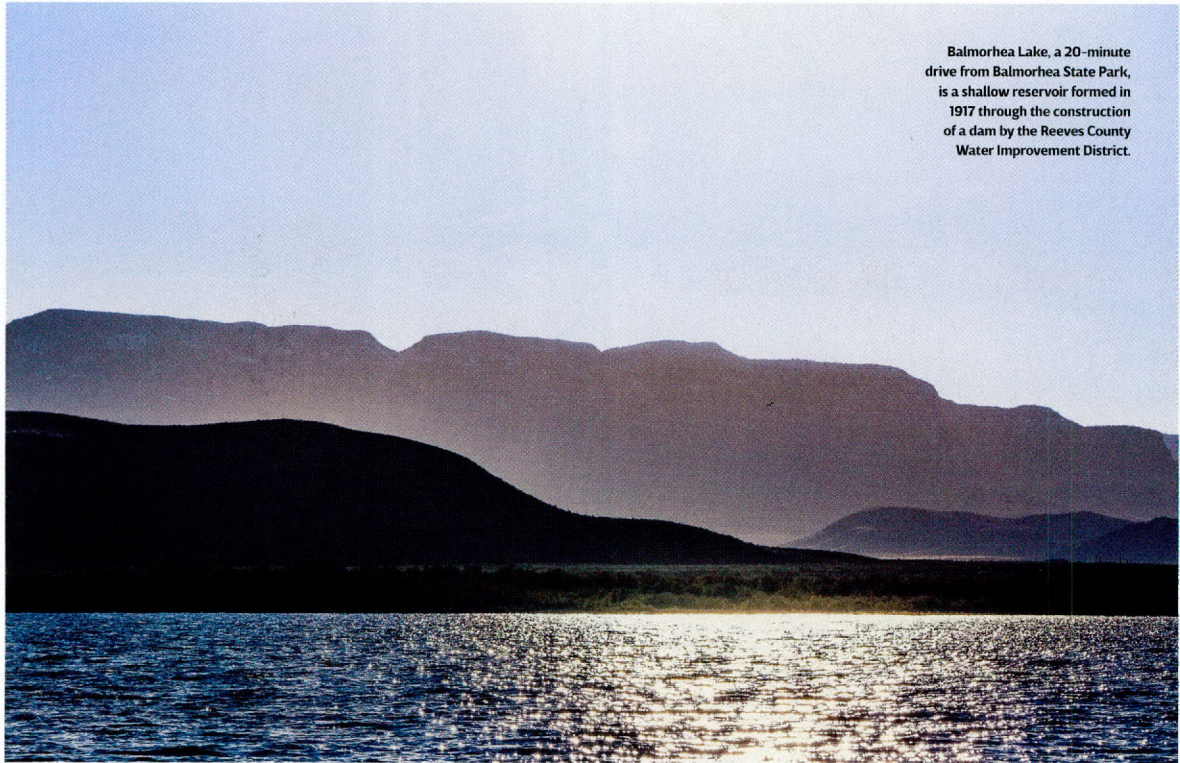
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EDITOR'S  
**NOTE**



Balmorhea Lake, a 20-minute drive from Balmorhea State Park, is a shallow reservoir formed in 1917 through the construction of a dam by the Reeves County Water Improvement District.

## Transcendent Texas

**W**hen photographer Jessica Lutz moved to Marfa a decade ago, she was drawn to capture West Texas' light, land, and story. For the cover shot of Calera Chapel in Balmorhea, she wanted to evoke the expansiveness of the site. "From dawn until dusk, the changing light reflects on the exterior walls of the chapel," she says. "Somehow, the feeling inspired by the vast landscape is enclosed within the chapel itself."

The chapel, which was restored in 2002 after being abandoned for decades, is open to visitors who often stop by on their way to nearby Balmorhea Pool. The latter is fed by San Solomon Springs, which has sustained communities for hundreds of years. The springs are one of the many sanctuaries—cultural, religious, and secular—we explore in this issue. Here, Lutz and other issue contributors share their own sacred spaces—places that bring them feelings of serenity and transcendence.

**Jessica Lutz:** Since moving to West Texas, I've been photographing roadside altars, shrines, and other sacred spaces. Made of clay and sand, The Swan House near Presidio is like an adobe cathedral, with vaults and domes reaching toward the sky. It is a place that seems to spring

from the earth itself, inherently indigenous, and captures the sublime in a way that gives it a spiritual aspect.

**Jennifer Stewart:** Everything seems louder these days, including public libraries—kids playing, people watching videos on cell phones without headphones, etc. Whenever I need unadulterated quiet, I go to Rice University's Fondren Library to read, write, and breathe. Quietly.

**Clayton Maxwell:** Since I was at the University of Texas at Austin in the '90s, I've been riding my bike to a hiding spot on Mount Bonnell. I stash my bike in the bushes and settle on a rock as far away from others as I can safely get. Then I just sit. The exercise endorphins mixed with the views of Lake Austin are an instant mood-lifter and head-clearer. I set a timer, and for about 15 minutes, I don't let anything distract me from being just right there. When it's time to fly back down the hill, I am energized and refreshed, every time.

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF



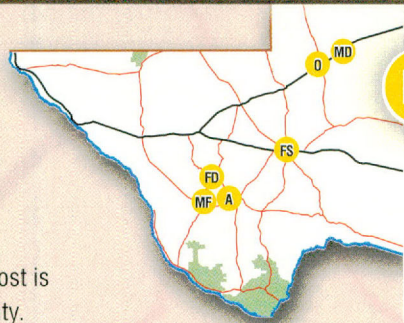
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Jeff Lynch

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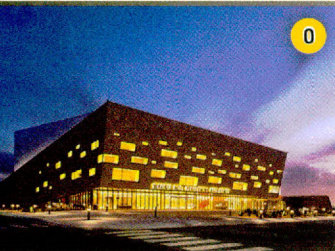
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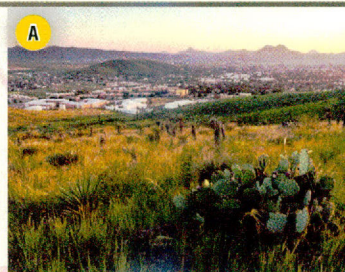
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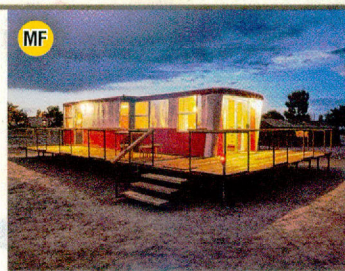
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**Feb 18** - Valentine's in Valentine



MF



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# FEBRUARY

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## **Eternal Springs**

Fueling Balmorhea State Park's swimming pool, San Solomon Springs is a desert oasis with deep history.

*By Katie Gutierrez*

*Photographs by Jessica Lutz*

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## **In Light of Nature**

The architecture of Fort Worth's Kimbell Art Museum complements the city's world-class collection of artwork.

*By Fowzia Karimi*

*Photographs by Dave Shafer*

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## **Sacred Spaces**

Tour some of Texas' most breathtaking human-made structures, both spiritual and secular.

*Photographs by Jeff Wilson*

**SAN SOLOMON**  
Springs fuels the popular West Texas oasis, Balmorhea Pool.

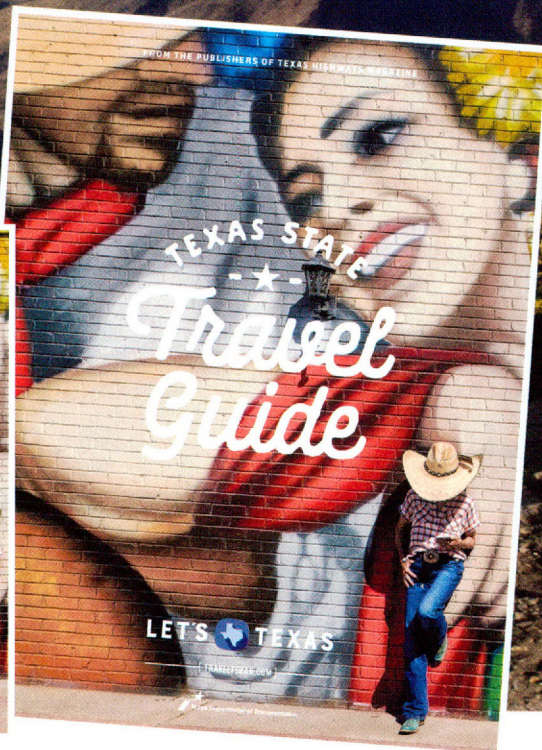
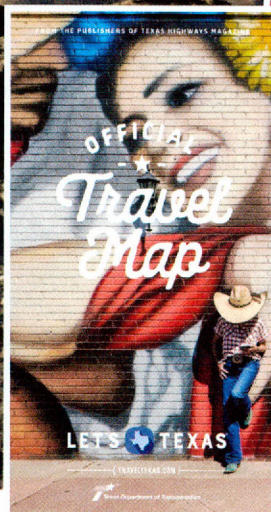
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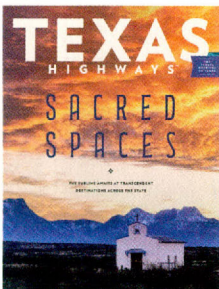
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## Behind the Story



Though contributing writer Katie Gutierrez had never heard of Balmorhea before working on “Eternal Springs” (Page 32), she says her solitary trip to the West Texas town was much needed. “It felt like a pilgrimage,” she says, “a long quiet drive toward finding something sacred.” She dove into the waters of Balmorhea Pool, among the world’s largest spring-fed pools and quite literally got lost in the Davis Mountains. She also ventured to nearby San Solomon Springs, a large series of ancient artesian springs that have provided for people throughout the centuries, from Indigenous tribes to the Mexican farming communities of the early 1900s. “I saw the springs as a constant, with almost a time-lapse of people around it—cultures shifting through the centuries, but not their need for water,” Gutierrez says. “I came to see the springs as what Jumano elder Felix Salmoron called them: a life source.”

## Featured Contributors

### Fernando A. Flores



Flores was born in Reynosa, Mexico, and raised in South Texas. He lives in Austin and is the author of *Valleyesque* and *Tears of the Trufflepig*. In “Devil’s Advocate” (Page 12), he wrote about his visit to New Braunfels’ Faust Hotel, which he looks at through the lens of Goethe’s classic play. “Digging up New Braunfels’ history reminded me Texas mythology has connections to every place in the world and possibly every work of literature,” he says. “It was illuminating to uncover a little corner of it at the Faust Hotel.”

### Jeff Wilson



Wilson is an Austin-based advertising and editorial photographer. He shoots for *Time*, *Men’s Journal*, *Field and Stream*, *Texas Monthly*, and *Scientific American*, and for brands such as Yeti, Costa, Gillette, National Instruments, and Anheuser-Busch. For “Sacred Spaces” (Page 50), Wilson captured the state’s most inspiring religious and secular structures. “The photo essay speaks to the great diversity of the state we live in,” he says. “Not just in geography or architecture, but in the disparate cultures that make up our collective identity.” Wilson has been nominated for several National Magazine Awards, and his work is included in the permanent collections of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University.



# MERGE



I taught school with a wonderful teacher who took off a week prior to Christmas vacation to make tamales. He bought a hog's head for the meat. All the other days of the school year, he never was once absent.

*Jan House Kiessling, via Facebook*

### Buñuelos

Grew up with these as a kid up in Washington ["I'll Be Home for Christmas," December]. My aunt made them, only ours are called rosettes.

 Christene Marie Graham

### Slaton Bakery

I have a bag of their ginger snaps in my pantry right now ["Just Like Grandma Used to Bake,"

December]. Love them!

 Lisa Mathisen Hines

### Santa Elena Sightseeing

Love me some Big Bend Country ["Split Scene," December]! Nothing else like this place.

 Ruth Cramer Smallwood

### Raisin D'être

Years ago, we used to get together with the neighbor across the street to make tamales every Christmas ["I'll Be Home for Christmas," December]. She would make dessert tamales with pumpkin or other fillings and raisins, as well as traditional spicy pork tamales. In a few batches of the pork tamales, she would put in some raisins. I liked those the best of all. My son and I are making tamales this weekend, and I'll be pushing for mostly medium-spicy pork with raisins. Man, are they good that way!

*Larry Schoellkopf, Huntsville*

### Color Theory

Went out to the Christmas Mountains a number of years ago to help a friend with his thesis research ["A Desert Holiday," December]. Noticed that the igneous rocks were red, and the parts that were cretaceous limestones made the trees stand out and look more green. Probably where the name comes from.

*Casey Mitchell, via Facebook*

### Sweet Memories

Collin Street Bakery fruitcake is the only fruitcake we would have at Christmas ["The Daytripper: Corsicana," December]. It was a tradition for my mom to order

every year, and she and I would indulge in every luscious bite. Now that she's gone, since no one else will eat it, and I can't eat it all myself, I hold tight to the memory of sharing with my mom. It's the best. I have several canisters in my possession; they're a pretty reminder of good times.

*Vicki Mann-Hawthorne, Corpus Christi*

### Synonym for Thesaurus

In the days of a paperback thesaurus, Elizabeth would have worn it out on this one article ["Too Wild To Love," December]. Sadly, she just wore out a keyboard!

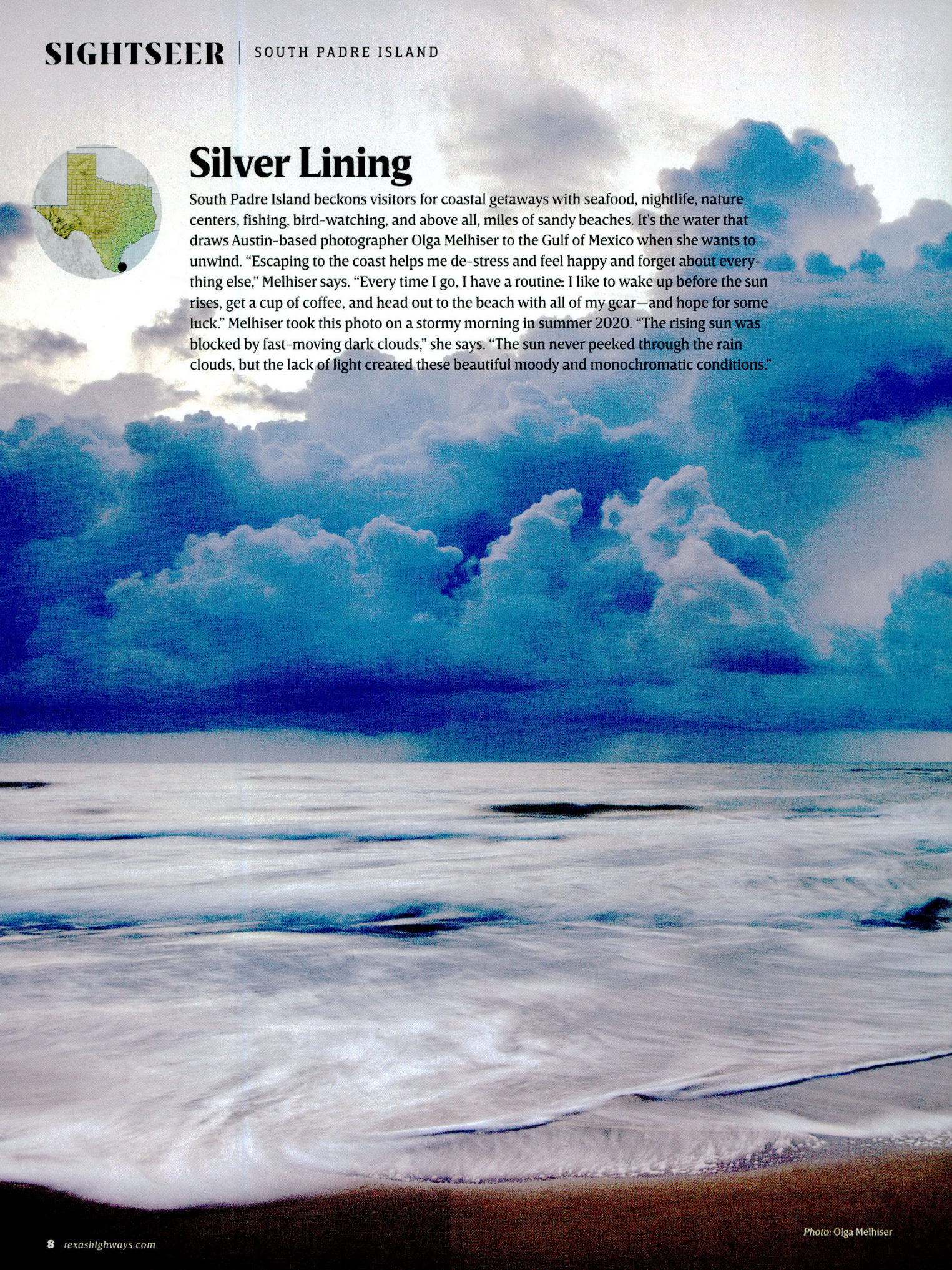
*Brent Johnson, Oklahoma*





## Silver Lining

South Padre Island beckons visitors for coastal getaways with seafood, nightlife, nature centers, fishing, bird-watching, and above all, miles of sandy beaches. It's the water that draws Austin-based photographer Olga Melhiser to the Gulf of Mexico when she wants to unwind. "Escaping to the coast helps me de-stress and feel happy and forget about everything else," Melhiser says. "Every time I go, I have a routine: I like to wake up before the sun rises, get a cup of coffee, and head out to the beach with all of my gear—and hope for some luck." Melhiser took this photo on a stormy morning in summer 2020. "The rising sun was blocked by fast-moving dark clouds," she says. "The sun never peeked through the rain clouds, but the lack of light created these beautiful moody and monochromatic conditions."











# Kaufman

Entrepreneur and volunteer Hector Torres thrives in his adopted North Texas home

By Regina L. Burns



**HECTOR TORRES** has been a member of the Lions Club for over 20 years. The group supports local nonprofits and runs local youth baseball and softball leagues.



**K**aufman was among the earliest American settlements in the North Texas region known as the Three Forks, named for the convergence of the Trinity River's West, Elm, and East forks. Mississippian William King arrived in 1840—a year before settlers showed up in the Dallas area—and built a stockade called King's Fort for protection from Comanche and other tribes that had long inhabited the fertile prairielands. Over the last century, Kaufman has become known as the original home of Tex-Mex chain El Chico, which has locations in six states and the United Arab Emirates. It's also the home of Kaufman County Veterans Memorial Park, which includes a four-fifths size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Hector Torres immigrated to Kaufman from Mexico when he was 17. He has thrived in the community as an entrepreneur and volunteer, including previously serving two terms on the Kaufman City Council. Torres, whose wife, Monica, is a third-generation Kaufmanite, describes his hometown as “one big family.”

### Finding Home

“My parents came from Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, to visit my older brother, who already lived in Kaufman, and decided to establish our home here. I arrived in Kaufman in June 1978, when I was 17. Even now, on Thursdays we go to my mother's and have dinner with her. She cooks mostly traditional dishes, such as enchiladas with rice and beans, mole, Mexican beef stew, Mexican chicken stew, and tamales.”

### Self-Taught

“Years ago, I taught myself how to read and write in English after I purchased a Spanish-English dictionary at the local Ben Franklin store. Also, I read the *Dallas Times Herald* newspaper aloud. There were many words I didn't know, but learning pronunciation gave me the confidence to speak to others.”

### Maps and More

“My business, Kaufman County Title & Abstract, closes real estate transactions. Buyers and sellers come to our office to sign their paperwork, and we also perform title searches to determine who owns a property. This office has Kaufman County maps dating back to 1888.”

### El Chico

“Kaufman is the home of the El Chico restaurant chain, although back then in the 1920s and '30s it was called Cuellar's Cafe. The Cuellar family lived at the Star Brand Ranch. I met some of the family at an event the Kaufman Chamber of Commerce hosted in the late '80s. I have always admired their efforts to better themselves and teach their families the results of hard work.”

### Prairie Provisions

“We have many good Mexican restaurants, but La Pradera is my favorite. My favorite dish is the Ruby's Special, which you can get with either beef or chicken fajita meat. It's served in a chunky salsa with rice and beans. Every time I recommend it to someone, they always comment on how much they liked it.”

### Historic Poor Farm

“Kaufman County received a historical marker in 1997 for the ‘poor farm’ in Kaufman. Back in 1883, the poor farm was created to care for the indigent. It's no longer operational, but Pam Corder with the Kaufman County Historical Commission oversees self-guided group tours. This site has a lot of history.”

### Houston Street

“Whenever an out-of-town visitor comes to Kaufman, I like to take them down our historic Houston Street. During Halloween, most homeowners open their doors and have candy, food, and music. The city closes the street to traffic to allow people to walk.”

### Home Sweet Home

“It wasn't what brought me to Kaufman as much as what made me stay here. There are many reasons, but some of the biggest ones would have to be my family, the opportunities given to me that helped me succeed, and the way our local leaders and everyone work together for the betterment of our community. It seems like one big family where everyone helps each other with one common goal—to make Kaufman a great place to live.”



## TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

7,379



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

10



YEAR FOUNDED:

1840



NEAREST CITY

Dallas, 35 miles northwest



MARQUEE EVENT:

Memorial Day Service, May 29 at the Kaufman County Veterans Memorial Park



MAP IT:

Kaufman County Veterans Memorial Park, 3800 S. Houston St.







# Devil's Advocate

The Faust Hotel in New Braunfels conjures thoughts of Goethe's *Faust*

By Fernando A. Flores

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I

In the Spanish-tiled lobby of the Faust Hotel, a large portrait of a bearded man with a pronounced mustache, wearing 19th century military armor, hangs on the western wall. He's holding a helmet in his right hand. Aside from the baby grand piano against the eastern wall, with a tiny sign warning that unless you're Mozart, please refrain from playing, this is the most noticeable decoration greeting hotel visitors. No plaque indicates who this mustached man might be, though it's admittedly

unusual to see a European military man given prominence in a Central Texas spot rather than, say, a Texan.

I was first introduced to the Faust Hotel during the spring of 2019, before my debut novel, *Tears of the Trufflepig*, was released. One of the events on a little pre-publication tour was at a bookseller conference in a hotel I'd never heard of located in New Braunfels. When I learned of the ominously named Faust Hotel, I was immediately intrigued. Like other voracious readers, I have a running list of classic literary works I've always wanted to consume but haven't found the time for. The tragic play in two parts commonly known in the Anglophone world as *Faust*, by the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, is one of them.

Faust. Every time I hear that name, which isn't common where I live, in Austin, I think of what anybody else who hasn't read his masterpiece but is familiar with the themes therein probably thinks of: the devil. Muscular red guy with a pointy tail and horns who tries to trick you for your eternal soul. Mephistopheles, in Goethe's work. (If you are into avant-garde music, you might also think of the 1970s krautrock band from West Germany.) Sometimes I fear I read into real life too much. Like working on a novel in progress, I constantly try to understand the past in relation to the present to make sense of what the future may bring. This is how the local, unwritten history and lore of a particular time and place come frequently to haunt me as a writer.



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*Faust, Part One* was published in 1808 and begins with the Lord and Mephistopheles making a classic bet, that the Lord's favorite erudite scholar, Dr. Faust, will not deviate from the golden path in his search for ultimate knowledge. In Dr. Faust's first scene, we find he is disappointed with his worldly pursuits and contemplates suicide. Mephistopheles then appears, offering Dr. Faust a deal to be signed in blood to help Dr. Faust in his earthly endeavors, and in return Dr. Faust will do the same for Mephistopheles in hell. What follows is a series of tragic encounters involving a dead baby, a dungeon, seduction, transmutions, and accidental deaths, all of which follow Dr. Faust to the second installment of *Faust*, published 24 years later.

The conference at the Faust Hotel was to be the launch of my book promotion, in this little old town founded by German immigrants. It was a cool, spring evening in New Braunfels, and I remember feeling this location appropriate, even giving me a boost of confidence that I'd be reading an excerpt of my novel to book-sellers at this historic hotel with literary associations in its name. I don't necessarily approach the devil in the Catholic sense, so I didn't feel the hotel's name meant my fate as a writer was doomed.

The four-story building stands out with its Spanish Colonial Revival design and air-conditioning units protruding from most windows. Its terra cotta work has sustained the weathering of time. Right by the entrance, there is a welcoming terrace with tables and umbrellas set up for people to enjoy food and beverages from the Faust Pub.

Prior to my reading, I walked across Seguin Avenue to Naegelin's Bakery, which claims to be "The Oldest Bakery in Texas," opened in 1868. I made it right before closing time and had a delicious pastry while admiring New Braunfels' downtown architecture. There's an original settlers' home turned German restaurant directly across from the hotel and about a hundred yards to the west, a little bistro that feels as if it was plucked out of a big city's French Quarter. These



charming 20th-century buildings were the type constantly getting razed in big cities, but luckily stayed still in the slower pace of smaller towns. Other downtown highlights: a French antique shop, a quaint, lively bowling alley, and open and available public restrooms, something bigger cities really need more of.

**Everything goes by so fast** during a book tour that you hardly have time to take in the local history of the places you visit, unless you actively make time for it in your stacked schedule. The tour happened, *Tears of the Trufflepig* was released to reviews I was happy with, and eight months later the pandemic struck, bringing with it imagery of past plagues, medieval times, and artistic works that had addressed previous pandemics. After a few years simmering with the discovery of the Faust Hotel, I was convinced there was some deep meaning buried in New Braunfels waiting for me to uncover. Why does this little hotel with the same name of arguably the most famous work of German literature exist in this little town between San Antonio and Austin?

During those pre-vax quarantine days, the Faust Hotel also conjured memories of stories about the devil—most notably a famous one from my upbringing in South Texas. I have since gone on to hear similar variations of the incident attached to other Texas cities: the night the devil manifested at some seedy nightclub. It must have been around 2000 when I first heard it. Local McAllen lore had it that one night, at a club on North 10th, or maybe off Jackson, past midnight and near closing time, smoke appeared suddenly on the dance floor. A group of people screamed, scattered, and a woman fell dead, while her dancing partner grew goat hooves and in a rush clopped toward the exit into the Rio Grande Valley night. Over the years, I've heard versions of this story from three different people who didn't know each other. One even claimed to have been present at that bar and swore to not touch a drop of liquor since. "Seeing the devil would do that to you," I recall him saying.

**The legend of Faust**, of a learned man who makes a deal with the devil to attain endless pleasure and knowledge, existed for almost three centuries before Goethe started writing *Faust* in his late 50s. It's commonly known by scholars today that this myth originated with the real-life "doctor" Johann Georg Faust. A contemporary of the theologian Martin Luther, Faust was a fierce independent thinker who swam against the currents of the time regarding matters of spiritual salvation. He dedicated his life to what was then known as "alchemistic learning," and his bombastic temperament made him a much talked about figure, steering the collective imagination toward fantastic realms that included how he'd made a sinister pact to achieve his notoriety.

After his death in 1540, when the Catholic sentiments of the cultural climate took over, Faust achieved what few do and became immortal through storytelling and art. Puppet shows relating the story of this warlock who made a deal with the devil became popular to the point of farce. How threatening can this Mephistopheles be when he's a stuffed cloth with stubby limbs and fake eyes? Faust's tragic story of his bargain with the devil, however, proved powerful enough to transcend the shortcomings of any theatrical production. So powerful, the story traveled beyond European borders, and almost 65 years later, in 1604, Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* was first performed in England by the troupe known as The Admiral's Men.

Over time, the real Faust became one of those figures like John Hardy or Johnny Appleseed—legends that originated with real people who go on to be written or sang about in scores of ways that rapidly blur the line between fantasy and reality. Questions of Faust's birthplace have been a matter of speculation and much debate, but in Knittlingen, Germany, there's a museum dedicated to this historical person's life, and how his death came to inspire lasting folklore all over the world.

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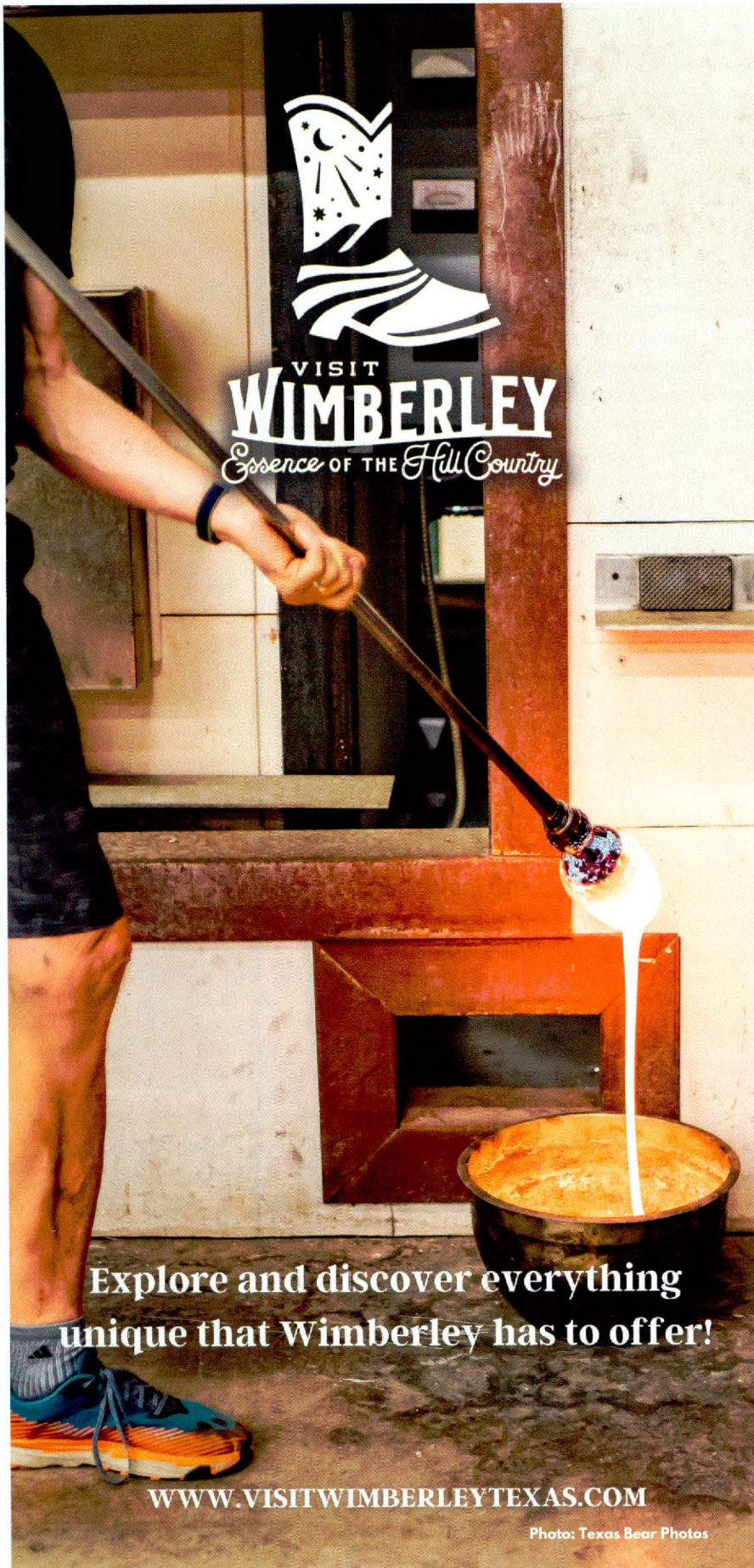
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## OPEN ROAD | ESSAY

New Braunfels was founded in 1845, about 13 years after Goethe's death and the posthumous publication of the second part of *Faust*. It's not hard to consider the cultural impact this distinguished German writer must have had on the city's founder. Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels was the commissioner general of *Adelsverein*, the mid-19th century German plot to turn Texas into a new German state. Even if he had never written the second part of *Faust* in his old age, Goethe's legacy as a man of letters was already sealed through his published works extending from scientific to autobiographical to dramatic texts. And that's not even mentioning the book that made him a sensation in his mid-20s, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

Prince Carl was months away from turning 20 when Goethe died in March of 1832. *Young Werther* by then was undoubtedly a classic, synonymous with *The Catcher in the Rye* or *The Bell Jar* in our time. Goethe's death would have been the equivalent of the recent deaths of pop culture legends like Little Richard, Joan Didion, and John Prine, who influenced the 20th century.

I found New Braunfels, rich with historical markers, to be a delight for people like myself who are curious about small pockets of history. On a placard by the Phoenix Saloon, one learns of the drinking establishment's long, chaotic history, which includes a pool of live alligators held by the proprietor more than 100 years ago. Facing the drive-thru of Naegelin's Bakery is a mural painted on the side of a building dedicated to Ferdinand Jacob Lindheimer, known as "The Father of Texas Botany." An intellectual who fled Germany to escape political oppression, Lindheimer lived in New Braunfels from 1844 to his death. He was the kind of erudite man the character Faust seemed to be—or even like Goethe himself, who was interested in botany and wrote a book regularly translated as *The Metamorphosis of Plants*.

A Confederate monument near a gazebo at New Braunfels' center depicts a young, surely blond, blue-eyed sol-



dier alongside a plaque erected in 1964 reminding us of the goal to “make the Confederacy an ocean-to-ocean nation.” Over 300 Confederate soldiers were enlisted at the site of this marker.

In my research, I learned that between the time of the Texas Revolution in the mid-1830s and the Mexican American War in the late 1840s, Germany was undergoing a transformation that would lead to its March Revolution of 1848. Many German intellectuals and free thinkers, not unlike Lindheimer, sought to escape. The artistic communities they created in rural Texas, outside of New Braunfels, were known as Latin Settlements. These immigrants were musically inclined, said to have suitcases filled with books, and usually moved on to bigger cities like Houston or San Antonio, leaving no trace of these settlements behind. For people who find

comfort in books like I do, moving away from home with only half a trunk full is a sacrifice. You take only what you absolutely can't do without, what defines you, your values, and possibly your culture.

According to the Faust Hotel, the Traveler's Hotel was built in 1929 at the same address, 240 S. Seguin Ave., over land that was once the site of the family home of Joseph Faust—a prominent banker and mayor of New Braunfels. Walter Faust, Joseph's son, secured the property for a future hotel after Joseph's death in 1924. Using rollers, it took over a week to move their original three-story family home down the street after its sale, where it currently stands, allowing for the hotel to be built. In 1936, after the death of Walter, the 63-room hotel was renamed the Faust Hotel, to honor the family. It has since withstood many renovations, hardships, and owners, while

still maintaining its original charm.

If ghosts haunt the Faust Hotel, like local legends and newspaper clippings framed on the vestibule walls proclaim, I never saw an elegantly dressed specter through my peripheral vision while turning a corner. Not once did an inanimate object in front of me move without prompt, nor did any fogged mirror try relaying a message after a shower. But surely one doesn't need to see a ghost to feel a haunting. I think of the ghosts supposedly walking around The Driskill, a venerable hotel in my hometown. I think of the legendary bluesman Robert Johnson, who is famously rumored to have made a Faustian bargain himself and recorded the bulk of his material at the Sheraton Gunter Hotel in downtown San Antonio. Though he didn't die there, one can still feel his haunting presence around Room 414.

continued on Page 69



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# DRIVE



**THE "REMEMBERING COLUMBIA" Museum** features exhibits devoted to the astronauts who perished in the shuttle explosion.





# Searching for Stars

On the 20th anniversary of the Columbia disaster, Hemphill recounts the community's recovery efforts

By Clayton Maxwell

## "REMEMBERING COLUMBIA" MUSEUM

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In the days following the Columbia space shuttle's disintegration over East Texas 20 years ago, the Piney Woods of Sabine County became hallowed ground. As part of the recovery team seeking the Columbia's remains in the wilderness, local Baptist pastor and volunteer firefighter Fred Raney found himself leading impromptu memorial services, what he calls "chapels in the forest."

Around 9 a.m. on Feb. 1, 2003, as thousands of pieces of the STS-107 shuttle thundered down, Raney and many Hemphill locals were suddenly thrust into critical new roles. Raney became an outdoor chaplain for the search team, composed of thousands of local volunteers and members of the National Guard, Texas and U.S. forestry



services, NASA, the FBI, and other groups. Together, they put on boots, rain slickers, and hard hats, and trudged through the brambles to search for the remains of the seven astronauts aboard the shuttle.

“When we found the astronauts, everyone just stopped in silence,” Raney says. “I knew Columbia’s Commander [Rick] Husband had read *Joshua 1:9* to his astronauts, so I read that scripture and said a prayer. Afterward, there was not a word said—it was very respectful. We walked through the thick woods silently, like a funeral procession, and made the trip back to the vehicle that would carry the astronauts’ remains to town. It’s something I’ll remember to the day I die.”

Of the many stories contained within the Columbia tragedy, the goodness and perseverance of the residents of Hemphill is one of the most enduring. According to *Bringing Columbia Home*, an engrossing book published in 2018 about the Columbia’s final voyage, the ground search and recovery operation was the largest in U.S. history. The town swelled from a population of 1,100 people to over 10,000 during the two months of recovery. And much of its success is owed to the citizens of Hemphill.

Within hours of the first shuttle pieces falling, Belinda Gay, then president of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Hemphill, turned the VFW Hall into recovery headquarters. Grabbing naps on a cot in the VFW office, she organized what became known as “the great feed.” Hemphill residents woke as early as 2 a.m. to serve three hot meals a day to the thousands of newcomers to their town. Families welcomed strangers into their homes, seeding friendships that continue to this day. The National Guard moved into the high school gym, town electricians set up extra phone lines for the FBI and NASA, and the town funeral director performed funeral duties free of charge. Adrenaline, camaraderie, and many cathartic tears sustained volunteers through weeks of little sleep.

“You know, our community is a very humble place,” says Gay, who, along with



From left: The Columbia Star was installed as a tribute to the pilots; Belinda Gay helps run the Columbia Memorial Committee.

## “We’re just a bunch of country folks, and we just want to do what’s right.”

Marsha Cooper of the Texas Forestry Service, heads the Columbia Memorial Committee. “We’re just a bunch of country folks, and we just want to do what’s right. We had to do our part and try to recover the Columbia and take care of all those people who came here to our community. It’s hard to explain.”

Gay, Cooper, and other local leaders who assisted the Columbia recovery have ensured the astronauts’ legacies live on. In 2005, their committee installed

the Columbia Star at the intersection of State Highway 87 and Farm-to-Market Road 83. The circular concrete platform is 20 feet in diameter and painted red, white, and blue with a star and the Columbia mission insignia. Words encircling it read “Their Mission Became Our Mission.” The star is flanked by a historical marker engraved with the astronauts’ names. There is also a monument to two searchers: pilot Jules “Buzz” Mier Jr. and Texas Forestry Service aviation specialist Charles Krenek. Both died in a helicopter crash during recovery.

In 2009, the committee opened the Patricia Huffman Smith NASA “Remembering Columbia” Museum, funded by real estate developer Albert Smith and named in memory of his late wife. Housed in a nondescript beige metal building, the museum conveys the





Astronaut Willie McCool's exhibit case conveys his admiration for John Lennon.

significance of the Columbia disaster and memorializes the astronauts. A group selfie on display—taken during the mission by Husband, a U.S. Air Force colonel and native of Amarillo—is particularly striking. In it, all of the astronauts float together in a zero-gravity huddle, smiles on their bright faces. The photo was retrieved from a camera found in the wreckage.

The museum features a 7-foot glass case dedicated to each astronaut. One case contains the running shoes of Lubbock native Willie McCool, the

**“If you live in small rural towns, your chances of working with an astronaut or engineer aren’t very high. Through this, we’re keeping the astronauts’ legacy alive.”**

boyishly handsome Columbia pilot who was a dedicated runner. McCool's case also includes a photo of John Lennon's memorial in Central Park. "Imagine" was McCool's favorite song, and ground control regularly played it for the crew while on board the shuttle. These personal artifacts allow visitors to zoom out from the tragedy and see the bigger picture of the astronauts' lives.

A beaded dress stands out among the personal belongings. It was a favorite of astronaut Kalpana Chawla, a native of India who moved to Texas in 1982



to attend the University of Texas at Arlington, where she received a master's degree in aerospace engineering. "That dress was hard to part with, but it doesn't do any good in my basement," says Jean-Pierre Harrison, Chawla's husband of close to 20 years at the time of the Columbia disaster. "In public, Kalpana was always wearing the blue NASA jacket or orange pressure suit, so that dress shows another side of her personality. I'm happy for the museum to have it. I felt like we were in this together."

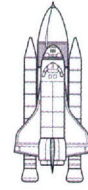
Harrison has found his own way to preserve the legacy of the astronauts. He wrote a biography of Chawla, *The Edge of Time*, and corresponds with girls from India who look up to Chawla as a role model. He has offered guidance to one Indian woman studying to

be an astronaut and recently selected an Indian filmmaker to lead the production of a biopic about Chawla.

Hemphill's memorial committee also seeks to inspire students in science and engineering. As part of a three-day anniversary event this year, the town will host a robotics competition for local high school students, with NASA representatives in attendance.

"How many kids in this East Texas area are going to have that opportunity?" Gay asks. "If you live in Houston, maybe. But if you live in small rural towns, your chances of working with an astronaut or engineer aren't very high. Through this, we're keeping the astronauts' legacy alive."

Raney's chapels in the forest ended 20 years ago, but Hemphill will always remember. For many, the Piney Woods of Sabine County remain sacred ground. **L**



## Columbia Remembered

A 20th-anniversary memorial event will take place Jan. 30-Feb. 1 in Hemphill.

Speakers from NASA, Boeing, and other organizations will present at the "Remembering Columbia" Museum.

There will be an art show, a robotics competition, and panel discussions. An anniversary program, "STS-107 Still Our Mission: 20 Years Later," will take place at the First Baptist Church on Feb. 1 at 7:45 a.m. For more information, visit [nascolumbiamuseum.com](http://nascolumbiamuseum.com).

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# Sphere of Influence

The 'Legacy of Love' monument is a beacon for the LGBTQ community

By Dina Gachman

**I**t started with a picture in *The Dallas Morning News*: an empty patch of unruly grass covered by a sign that read YOUR DESIGN HERE. When Allen resident and landscape artist Cheryl Baez saw the ad, she immediately started brainstorming. The challenge was to create a monument that reflected the inclusivity of Dallas' Oak Lawn neighborhood, which has been the heart of the city's LGBTQ community since the 1970s. "They were singing my song," Baez says. "I was familiar with Oak Lawn all my life and wanted to celebrate the ambience and character there."

Baez's winning design, *Legacy of Love*, is a 27-foot-tall obelisk topped with a sphere. She wanted to create a sense of unity by merging contrasting forms. Around 150 individual, organizational, and corporate donor names are engraved into the work, in some cases substituted with "In Memory of." The Oak Lawn Committee, dedicated to improving the quality of life in the historic Oak Lawn neighborhood, placed the ad in the paper.

Committee member John Olson says they received about 30 applications when they put out the call in 2004. The submissions ranged from "scribbles on paper" to professional plans. Olson likens Baez's sphere to a "disco ball." Since its unveiling in 2006, *Legacy of Love* has been a safe haven for Dallasites. Over a thousand people headed to the monument to celebrate the Supreme Court legalizing marriage equality in 2015 (right). It was also a gathering spot after the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando and the 2021 killing of Justin Thompson, a gay man, in Dallas.

Located at the intersection of Cedar Springs Road and Oak Lawn Avenue, *Legacy of Love* has been damaged by an occasional errant driver or ill-intentioned vandal over the years, but private funds allow the Oak Lawn Committee to repair and maintain the monument. This past year the group changed the three bands of white light at the top of the obelisk to LED that can be switched from various solid colors to multicolors depending on the occasion. "It was a desolate little triangle, a blank island that had no purpose," Olson says. "Now it's a symbol of diversity." For more information, visit [oaklawncommittee.org](http://oaklawncommittee.org). 📍









# Peace and Quiet

How to escape the noise in an ever-louder world

By Jennifer Stewart



**Everything is bigger in Texas, sure.** But these days, it seems like everything is louder, too. From construction on our continually widening freeways to omnipresent leaf blowers, Texans are exposed to a clamorous cacophony of noises that pushes our hearing health to the max. “You might be attending lots of outdoor or indoor concerts; you might be going to see friends at restaurants or bars,” says Dr. Tony Milesi, audiologist at RK Audiology in Austin. “Those types of places can really get a lot louder than we realize at the moment.” Noise pollution—exposure to noise measuring over 65 decibels (a vacuum cleaner measures about 70 decibels, for comparison)—is getting harder to escape. Luckily, Texas has plenty to offer when it comes to finding quiet spaces to protect our hearing and overall well-being.



## Creating Quiet

Texas' infrastructure contributes a lot of discord to our already noisy lives. Urban and transportation planners are tasked with improving transportation, housing, and commercial infrastructure to decrease noise in communities, according to Ruben Landa, president of the Greater Dallas Planning Council. “The more dense things get, the louder it gets,” Landa says. One solution is adding more green spaces to break up the density of roads and developments. “It’s not just about having green space to make good environmental sense,” Landa says. “It’s also an opportunity for people to get away from the big city and enjoy serene and relaxing spaces.” You don’t have to travel to a national park or swanky resort to find quiet. Texas’ public parks and libraries offer accessible places to unplug.



**30  
decibels**

Sound intensity of a whisper

**85  
decibels**

Sound intensity that can cause hearing damage

**140  
decibels**

Highest recorded sound intensity of cheers at a football game

## Hear Me Out

Austin audiologist Dr. Tony Milesi shares tips for navigating noisy places.

**What effect does a louder society have on our health?** “As a society, we may be getting louder, but I think it depends on where you live and what your life consists of activity wise. Noise can cause all sorts of things including tinnitus, or ringing in the ears. It can cause a lot of ear fatigue and make you physically tired as well.”

### What can Texans do to protect their hearing if they live or work in loud spaces?

“Noise canceling headphones can be nice for situations like living in an apartment trying to drown someone else out; just make sure you’re not turning them up too loud. There are custom plugs audiologists can make that have a filter that brings down the overall sound. These plugs really help protect your hearing.”

### Where do you go for peace and quiet?

“It’s great to go on walks or a hike. I like to fish, so going out on a nice quiet little lake or river or anywhere that is secluded can get you away from some of that day-to-day noise.”



## Urban Respites

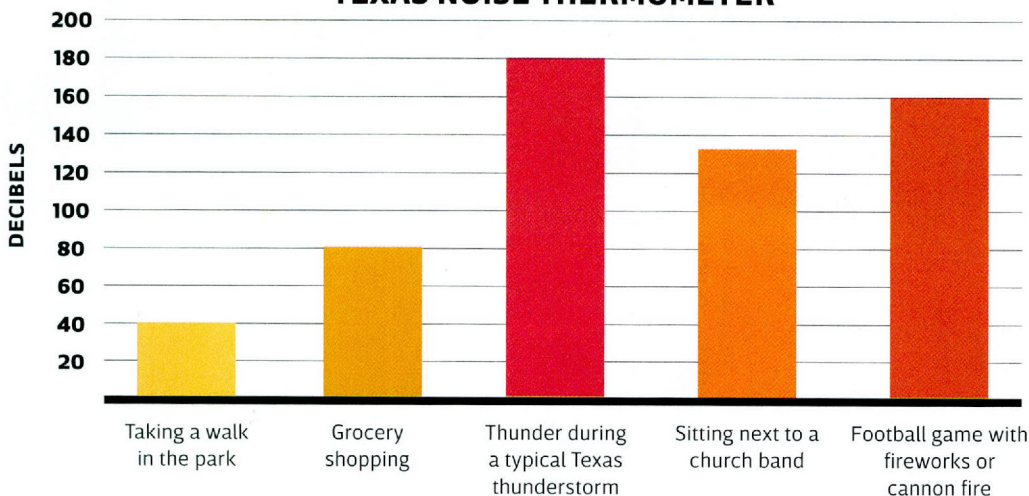
For those of us who reside in bustling big cities, it can be difficult to schedule time away.

Places like **Barton Creek Greenbelt** in Austin allow for a quiet getaway in the city, as does Dallas’ 1,000-acre **White Rock Lake**.

The 12-acre **Discovery Green** park in Houston has city amenities, and **Bates M. Allen Park** in nearby Kendleton offers a less populated escape.

**Franklin Mountains State Park** is the best place to find quiet in El Paso, and **Malaquite Beach** offers a calm respite in Corpus Christi.

### TEXAS NOISE THERMOMETER



Estimates based on data from Pulsar Instruments and the Noise Control Engineering Journal

## Mind, Body, and Soul

“In overall well-being, quiet plays the role of the teacher and student,” says Alisha Burrell, a yoga coach and wellness entrepreneur based in Dallas. “We learn how to observe and be in the present.” Benefits of quiet for our mental health include:

**Boosted energy levels**

**Reduced negative emotions**

**Improved breathing**

**Improved concentration**



The 1886 Stafford Opera House was restored in 1990.



# On a Bend of the Colorado

Columbus celebrates 200 years of small town charm among the live oaks

By Stacey Swann

Settlers established Columbus 200 years ago, which makes it Texas' oldest surveyed and platted Anglo-American town. Set on a bend of the Colorado River where there was once a Native American village, Columbus has been a center of activity since its early days. Colonists among Stephen F. Austin's original "Old Three Hundred" established an inn, a mill, and a ferry crossing in 1823, when the town was also a seat of colonial government. These days, Columbus is located at the intersection of Interstate 10 and State Highway 71—a midway point for drivers between Houston and Austin or Houston and San Antonio. Many who stop to stretch their legs find Columbus to be a destination in itself. Adorned with historical architecture and ancient live oaks, the town harbors local shops on the Colorado County Court-house square. Columbus also makes a comfy home base for a weekend of antiquing in nearby Round Top and touring the ornate Painted Churches of Texas, built by Czech and German immigrants in the late 1800s.



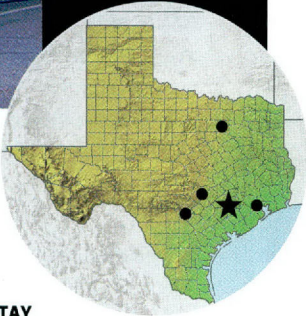


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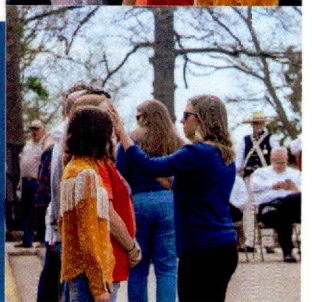
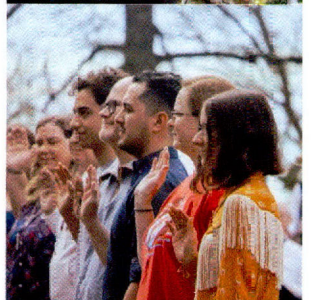
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**1 / THE CARRIAGE STEP BED & BREAKFAST** Guests can book one of two rooms (\$135/night) or the entire facility (\$199/night) at this historic 1890s home on a quiet street located three blocks from the square. The lodging, which is also an event rental, features antique furniture, a tearoom, a kitchen, and a sunroom overlooking the spacious backyard.



**5 / ALL THAI'D UP** This weekday lunch spot is well worth re-arranging your travel schedule to sample. Ying Sherwood began the business as a food truck but recently put down brick-and-mortar roots in a converted gas station a block from the courthouse square. You can wait for your green curry with crispy chicken, tom yum soup, or laab moo at shaded picnic tables, or order ahead online.



**2 / SCHOBELS** Founded by brothers Bobby and Andy Schobel in 1979, this family restaurant is a favorite for locals and I-10 travelers alike. The pecan waffles, schnitzel, chicken-fried steak, and pies are a delicious tour of Texas comfort foods. For the indecisive, Schobels offers a buffet daily at lunch, on Friday and Saturday at dinner, and on the weekends at breakfast.



**6 / COLORADO COUNTY COURTHOUSE** Built in 1890 and restored in 2014, the impressive Classic Revival courthouse has a second-floor courtroom featuring intricate woodwork and a stunning Tiffany-style domed skylight. The three-story brick building is open for self-guided tours Monday-Friday. Pick up a tour pamphlet across the street at the chamber of commerce.



**3 / THE COLORADO RIVER** The 6.5-mile Columbus Paddling Trail follows a horseshoe bend around town. Paddlers ply the river year-round, and in summer, Columbus River Co. offers tube rentals and shuttles. Beason's Park marks the site of Columbus' old ferry crossing and the spot where Sam Houston's army camped during the Runaway Scrape.



**7 / KAY KLAUBER CANDIES** The late Kay Klauber began making her Southern-style candies in 1962, and her children continue to sell treats in downtown Columbus. The shop churns out handmade pecan brittle, peanut brittle, jalapeño peanut brittle, and peanut patties. It also offers a selection of other candies and specialty foods, such as Finnish soft licorice.

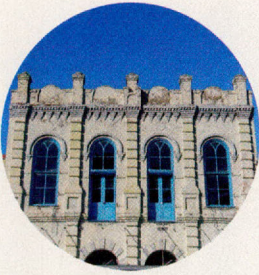


**4 / HISTORIC AUDIO TOUR** An app guides drivers on a tour of 10 historical sites, including several from the so-called Colorado County Feud, a series of gun-fights from 1898-1907 sparked by politics. Find the app by searching "Discover Columbus Texas" on app stores, or get a paper map at the chamber of commerce, housed in the 1886 Stafford Opera House on the courthouse square.



**8 / HOUND SONG BREWERY** Opened in 2020, this craft brewery has quickly become a hub of Columbus social life. The menu of inventive brews features favorites like Double Backbone, a Czech dark lager, and High Cotton, a hazy IPA. The kitchen serves burgers, sandwiches, and salads. Try the Texas Dip with shaved rib-eye, Havarti cheese, and caramelized onions. 🍷





## Columbus 200

To celebrate its founding in 1823, Columbus is holding a series of bicentennial events that highlight the town's historical character. In January, a 50-year-old time capsule was unearthed and replaced with a new capsule created by local students. On Feb. 11, the Stafford Opera House will hold a performance of *The Great Gatsby* featuring another bygone era, the 1920s. The capstone of the Columbus 200 celebration will be the town's annual Magnolia Days, May 19-20. The festival features tours of landmark structures, such as Alley Log Cabin and Dilue Rose Harris House; historical reenactments and demonstrations; and a concert on the courthouse square.

columbus.texas.org;  
magnoliadays.org

### Colorado River RV Campground

Located 6 miles northwest of town, the facility offers more than 200 RV sites with full or partial hookups, cabin rentals, hiking trails through pecan groves, and fishing on the Colorado River. Amenities include a swimming pool, mini-golf course, restrooms with showers, and a laundry room.

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BY KATIE GUTIERREZ

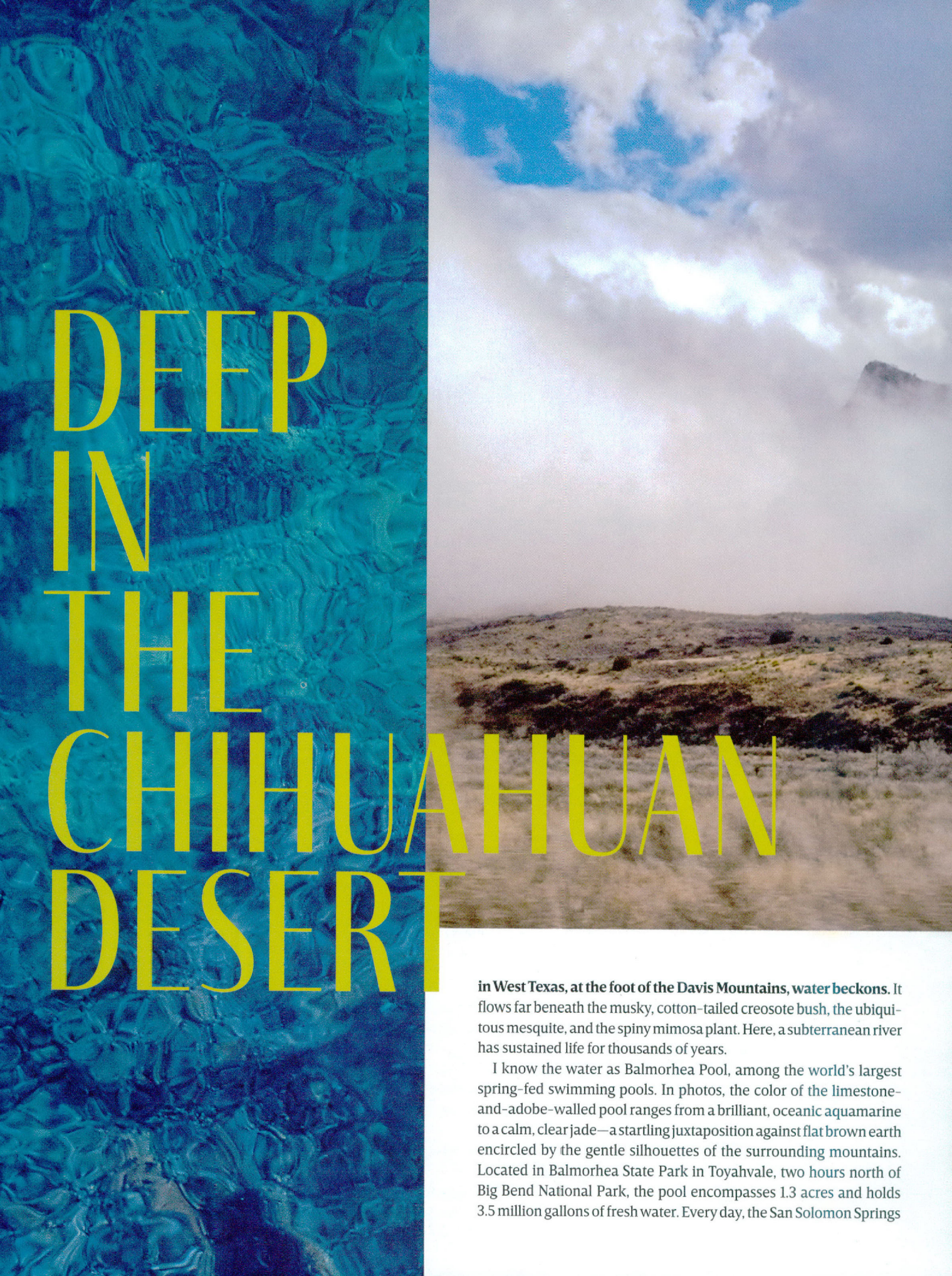
# ETERNAL SPRINGS



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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSICA LUTZ





# DEEP IN THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT

**in West Texas, at the foot of the Davis Mountains, water beckons.** It flows far beneath the musky, cotton-tailed creosote bush, the ubiquitous mesquite, and the spiny mimosa plant. Here, a subterranean river has sustained life for thousands of years.

I know the water as Balmorhea Pool, among the world's largest spring-fed swimming pools. In photos, the color of the limestone-and-adobe-walled pool ranges from a brilliant, oceanic aquamarine to a calm, clear jade—a startling juxtaposition against flat brown earth encircled by the gentle silhouettes of the surrounding mountains. Located in Balmorhea State Park in Toyahvale, two hours north of Big Bend National Park, the pool encompasses 1.3 acres and holds 3.5 million gallons of fresh water. Every day, the San Solomon Springs





OPENING SPREAD:  
THE CLEAR WATERS  
OF THE BALMORHEA  
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LINGERS OVER THE  
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BALMORHEA.

discharge 15 million gallons of water into the pool, keeping it clear and cool, and providing a home for the nearly extinct Comanche Springs pupfish, which exist nowhere else.

I drive more than five hours west from San Antonio on Interstate 10 to see this revelatory oasis. When I finally turn off the highway and follow signs to Balmorhea (population 475), I find a strip of shuttered brick and wood storefronts. Colorful twinkle lights adorn the small tin-sided Balmorhea Grocery; a hut with a faded sign reads Matta's Burger Place; and two ranch-style motels welcome weary travelers. Dusty residential streets extend like thin arteries from the main road, revealing an apartment complex with bright blue

doors, aging pastel homes, and immaculate trailers. It's a town, I sense, that has needed to be stubborn to survive.

Because look around—at the low, swollen clouds, charcoal bellies ready to split with rain above the mesquite and fourwing saltbush. Feel your tiny-ness, your blink of a lifespan, against the rise of distant mountains. Feel the isolation and imagine life here when there was nothing but this land. A place of power and danger, where only the water might save you.

**Texas history, as I learned it in school, left out a lot.** The “story of Texas,” we were taught, begins in 1519, when Alfonso Álvarez de Piñeda became the first European to map the Gulf Coast. Then came conquistadores, friars, missions, settlements, wars with “hostile Natives.” As far as a story goes, it



seems we started toward the end, and the older I get the more curious I become about all that came before.

In *The Indians of Texas: From Prehistoric to Modern Times*, historian William W. Newcomb Jr. wrote, “In trans-Pecos Texas ... lived a people at the beginning of history who are known variously as the Patarabueye, Jumano, Suma, and by some other names. This culture type is the least known and the most enigmatic of all the far-flung Texas natives.” Newcomb noted that eventually the Jumanos, along with many other tribes, were “irrevocably, finally, extinguished.”

This is not exactly accurate.

“Every author thinks they know everything about the Jumanos,” said Felix Salmeron, a Jumano Nation elder and historian. “The problem is, there is hardly any documentation out there written or interpreted by Jumanos. The only kind of written history about [the Trans-Pecos region] was done by the Spanish and the friars. So the authors get information about the Jumanos from somebody else, and if there’s a gap, they take the liberty to fill it with their thoughts.”

Salmeron, like his ancestors, was born in the Trans-Pecos, defined in 1887 by Texas geologist Robert T. Hill as the portion of Texas west of the Pecos River. In Pecos, Salmeron grew up in the 1950s with his family in a two-room cottage with a dirt floor and a fire pit where his mother cooked. They raised chickens and grew corn, and they had access to fruit trees and a river where they fished. There were plentiful deer in the area, just one of which could provide meat for a month. The women took care of the gardens, homes, and children while the men traded wares and the hides of deer and buffalo.

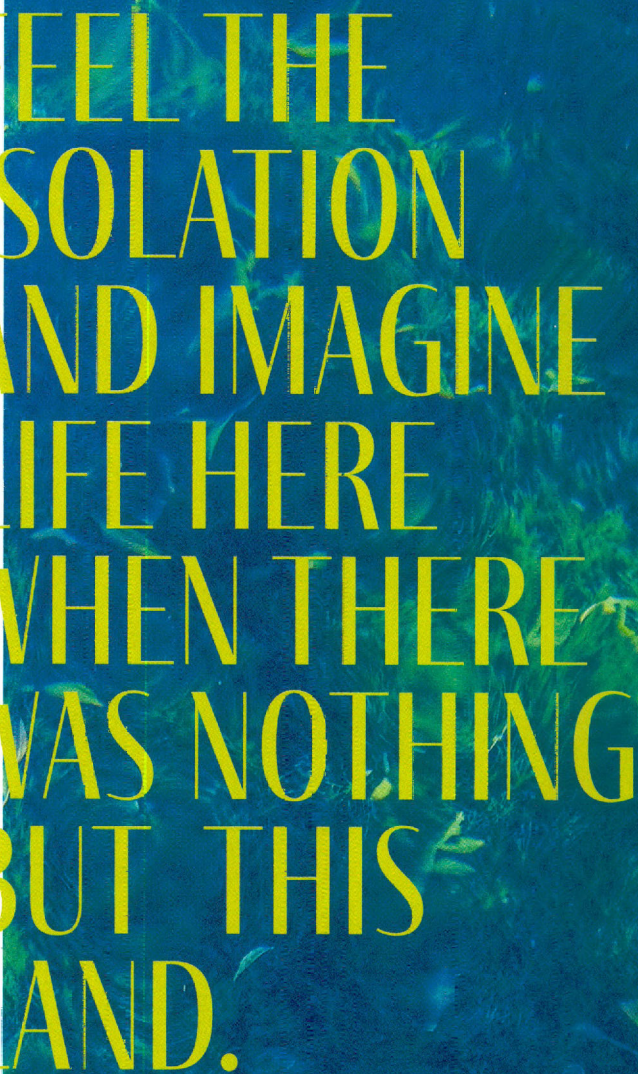
As a young boy, Salmeron asked his grandmother in Spanish, “What am I?” She responded, “Eres Jumano.” But *jumano*, in Spanish, also means human. “It took me a long time to figure out what she meant,” Salmeron said.

The first known use of the word Jumano to describe a specific group was in 1581, when Spanish conquistador Antonio de Espejo referred to villagers at La Junta de los Ríos, where the Rio Grande and the Rio Conchos meet at the present-day cities of Presidio and Ojinaga, Chihuahua.

In early 1583, the Espejo-Beltran Expedition followed the Pecos River south to the present-day town of Pecos, where they encountered, according to Newcomb, three nomadic Jumanos. They guided Espejo and his men along Toyah Creek, through Balmorhea and toward the area where Fort Davis and Marfa are now located, and down Alamito Creek toward the Rio Grande.

“The only Jumanos that were nomadic in the early days were the ones that went hunting and trading,” Salmeron said. “The families built rancherías, which were apartment-style complexes.”

According to Salmeron, the Jumanos lived in Ojinaga, Chihuahua, up north through Presidio, and around the San Solomon Springs area—where Balmorhea is now located—all the way up to New Mexico. Each settlement was chosen for its access to water, which was honored, along with the



FEEL THE  
ISOLATION  
AND IMAGINE  
LIFE HERE  
WHEN THERE  
WAS NOTHING  
BUT THIS  
LAND.

sun, Earth, and wind, as one of the Jumanos’ life sources.

“Solomon Springs gave quite a bit to the natives,” Salmeron said. “It was a great place to be able to grow corn and other vegetables. They captured a lot of fish and even buffalo. The Easterners are given credit for some of the technology to bring water to the vegetation, but that was being done many, many years before they came out there.”

Gradually, incursions from the Apaches, Comanches, and Spanish forced the Jumanos to abandon the Trans-Pecos region, assimilate with other tribes, or absorb and accept a Mexican identity—particularly, Salmeron noted, to avoid forced relocation during the Indian Removal Act in the 1830s. By then, Mexico had won its independence from Spain. In 1836, the Republic of Texas won its independence from Mexico, becoming its own country until 1845,





FROM TOP: THE CALERA CHAPEL NEAR BALMORHEA; ENRIQUE MADRID, OF BEDFORD, IS A WEST TEXAS RESIDENT WHO TRACES HIS HERITAGE TO THE JUMANO TRIBE.

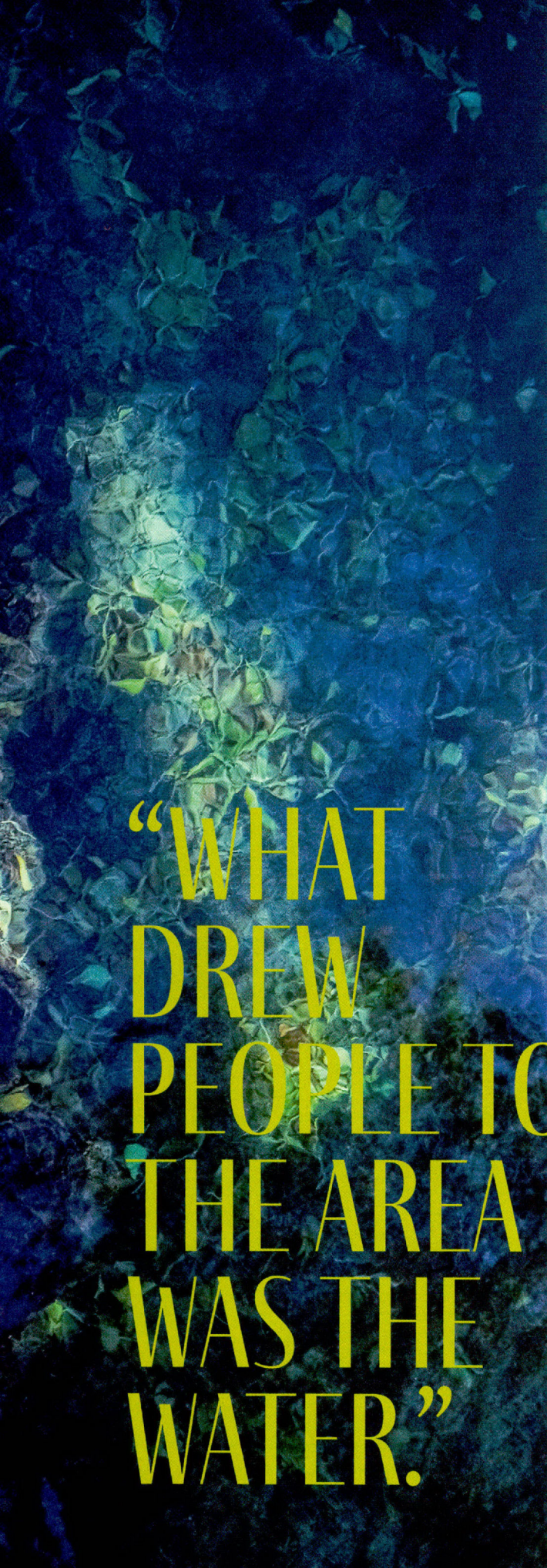
when it was annexed to the United States. By 1849, the San Solomon Springs were known as the Mescalero Springs for the Mescalero Apache who watered their horses there. Well before then, in the 1770s, is when historians such as Newcomb say the Jumanos “disappeared.”

“There have always been Jumanos in the area,” Salmeron said. “There are still Jumanos in the area.”

**The San Solomon Springs is the largest** in a series of artesian springs in the Balmorhea area, believed to be up to 11,000 years old. In 1900, the springs flowed at a rate of 230 gallons per second. By then, Reeves County—which







“WHAT  
DREW  
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WAS THE  
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includes Balmorhea, Toyah, Toyahvale, Pecos, Saragosa, and Pecos—had nearly 2,000 residents, who were predominantly farmers of Mexican descent. The census from that year showed 63 farms countywide, comprising nearly 900,000 acres and 51,000 head of cattle.

“What drew people to the area was the water,” said Pat Brijalba, who lived in Reeves County for 73 years before moving to Odessa last January.

In Calera, a now-abandoned town about 3 miles west of Balmorhea, inhabitants built small huts, or *tapias*, into the banks of Toyah Creek. The stream flows northeast of Balmorhea 50 miles west to the Pecos River. Brijalba’s great-grandmother lived in a *tapia*, and she described a sod roof where the family planted vegetables. Brijalba has helped collect the history of families who lived in Calera as far back as the early 1900s. This includes a woman named Lupe Renteria Lyles, who described life in Calera around 1923 as “hard, happy, abundant, and filled with great people.”

Brijalba said life in Calera began to change in the 1940s, when farming became mechanized and access to water changed. With the goal of improving the area’s old irrigation system, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation acquired Phantom Lake Springs, a spring-fed natural lake that formed outside the mouth of the limestone Phantom Cave, a privately owned site near Calera. The Bureau of Reclamation diverted spring water from the cave into two new canals and reconstructed a dam, furnishing water to more than 10,000 irrigable acres. Irrigation wells caused the Phantom Lake Springs flow to decline by such an extent that by 1983, Phantom Lake had all but disappeared, and Calera’s section of Toyah Creek dried up. But, according to Brijalba, residents moved away long before then, leaving very little evidence of their lives behind.

One exception is Calera Chapel, established as a mission in 1902, when a 34-year-old priest from the Netherlands named Nicolas Brocardus began serving the area. The small adobe and rock structure was plastered in the 1940s. Decades later, it stood abandoned, a refuge for bats, cows, and horses. “I always saw the abandoned church and wondered—when was this church built, who attended here, what kind of church was it? I thought, we could probably restore that and people would come see it,” Brijalba said.

In 2002, Brijalba teamed with Kate Vigneron, his boss at *The Balmorhea News* at the time, to restore the chapel. A philanthropist and entrepreneur who’d moved to the area from France and opened several local businesses, Vigneron became the benefactor for the chapel’s restoration. Brijalba, along with other community members and a crew from Fort Davis, went to work. They removed the old plaster, revealing the original adobe, mud, and rock, and replastered everything but the exterior back wall of the church. They broke pieces of concrete from abandoned farm canals, mixed cement, and laid it down as a new floor. Without electricity, Brijalba suggested a skylight. Vigneron had heavy wood doors made in Mexico to honor the period when the chapel was first built. Woodworking friends in Midland and



Balmorhea constructed pews that gleam warm as honey in the natural light.

After the project was complete, Brijalba became the chapel's caretaker, cleaning it several times a week until he moved to Odessa. At that point another community member, Robin Boyd, took over caretaking duties.

Now people come to the chapel to pray and to get married, even without electricity or plumbing. They come to remember. Some happen upon the chapel, perhaps on their way to or from what really drew them to the area: the Balmorhea Pool, fed by the San Solomon Springs. They come for the water.

**In 1933, as part of the New Deal,** President Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC, which allowed single men ages 18-25 to enlist in work programs to improve America's public lands and parks. Meals and lodging were provided, and they were paid \$30 a month, \$25 of which would be automatically sent home to their families.

Recognizing the beauty and appeal of the San Solomon Springs, the State Parks Board acquired 46 acres along



THE CIVILIAN  
CONSERVATION CORPS  
BUILT BALMORHEA STATE  
PARK IN THE 1930S.



“THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN JUMANOS IN THE AREA. THERE ARE STILL JUMANOS IN THE AREA.”

THE RIO CONCHOS  
MEETS THE RIO  
GRANDE AT LA JUNTA  
DE LOS RIOS, NEAR  
PRESIDIO AND ITS  
SISTER CITY OF  
OJINAGA, MEXICO.







its headwaters in 1934. The next year, CCC Company 1856—comprised mostly of local residents, including Brijalba’s uncle, Rufus Brijalba—began building Balmorhea State Park. They constructed the roads, bridges, caretaker’s residence, the San Solomon Courts lodging, and, of course, Balmorhea Pool. (They also built the distinctive Indian Lodge at Davis Mountains State Park.)

“Before, that pool was just water coming out of the springs,” Brijalba said, “and early residents had a big diving platform they would use. Everything you see today, all the blocks you see around the pool, the wall, all that was cut out by hand. We owe the CCC a lot for what they did for Balmorhea.”

These days, more than 200,000 people visit Balmorhea State Park each year, though current visitation is capped at 650 people per day. Most are eager to swim, snorkel, or scuba dive in the desert. Then there are those driven to solve other mysteries of the water.

Marine biologist Thomas Iliffe investigates the biodiversity, origins, evolution, ecology, and biogeography of animals (mostly crustaceans) inhabiting marine caves. Iliffe had heard stories about Phantom Cave and Phantom Springs Lake that intrigued him—namely, that previous explorations of the cave in the 1990s allowed divers to swim as far as a mile in, with no end in sight. Since then, diving technology has evolved to include diver propulsion vehicles and closed-circuit rebreathers. These would allow a team to push past that previous 1-mile limit to where the cave passage begins to stair-step down, becoming deeper and larger. He assembled scientists, explorers, surveyors, videographers, and a safety and logistics team, and then applied to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for a

scientific permit to access the site. His application was approved, and in late 2012, the team gathered in Balmorhea, where a fresh coat of snow created a surreal desert vista.

Over the next seven days, the team discovered the cave went deeper than anticipated. “They got down to a depth of 237 feet and could look down another long drop, but unfortunately we needed a different gas mixture to go down further,” Iliffe said. “So we came back a year later with the right gas mixture, and on this trip we got down to 462 feet. That was the deepest underwater cave in the United States at that time.”

As part of their exploration, the team laid down sediment traps, collected water quality data, and surveyed over 8,000 feet of the cave. They also did dye tracing to determine where the water in Phantom Cave was traveling.

“A couple days later, [the dye] came out in San Solomon Springs,” Iliffe said. “That is firm proof the water from the cave is supplying a major part, perhaps all, of the water that comes out in San Solomon.”

**I arrive at Balmorhea Pool with aching muscles,** skin salty with sweat. I had taken a wrong turn hiking in the Davis Mountains, shimmying down the side of the mountain 10 or 12 feet before realizing I was in trouble. My black leggings are red with dirt. Slivers of cactus needles are embedded in my palms from the climb back up. For a few minutes, as I searched for hand and foot holds to climb back up to the trail, I wondered if I’d make it home to my husband and two kids. How quickly life can go off track when you forget your place in nature.

On the mountain it was misty, but here in the valley the late summer sun washes over everything. A young couple goads each other onto the high dive, perched above the 25-foot-deep section of the pool. In the shallows, a white-bearded man says to his wife, seemingly not for the first time, that it’s time to go. He’s grouchy but affectionate: “You’d stay here all day if you could.” Another woman laughs and tells her companion, “The fish are nibbling my belly button ring!”

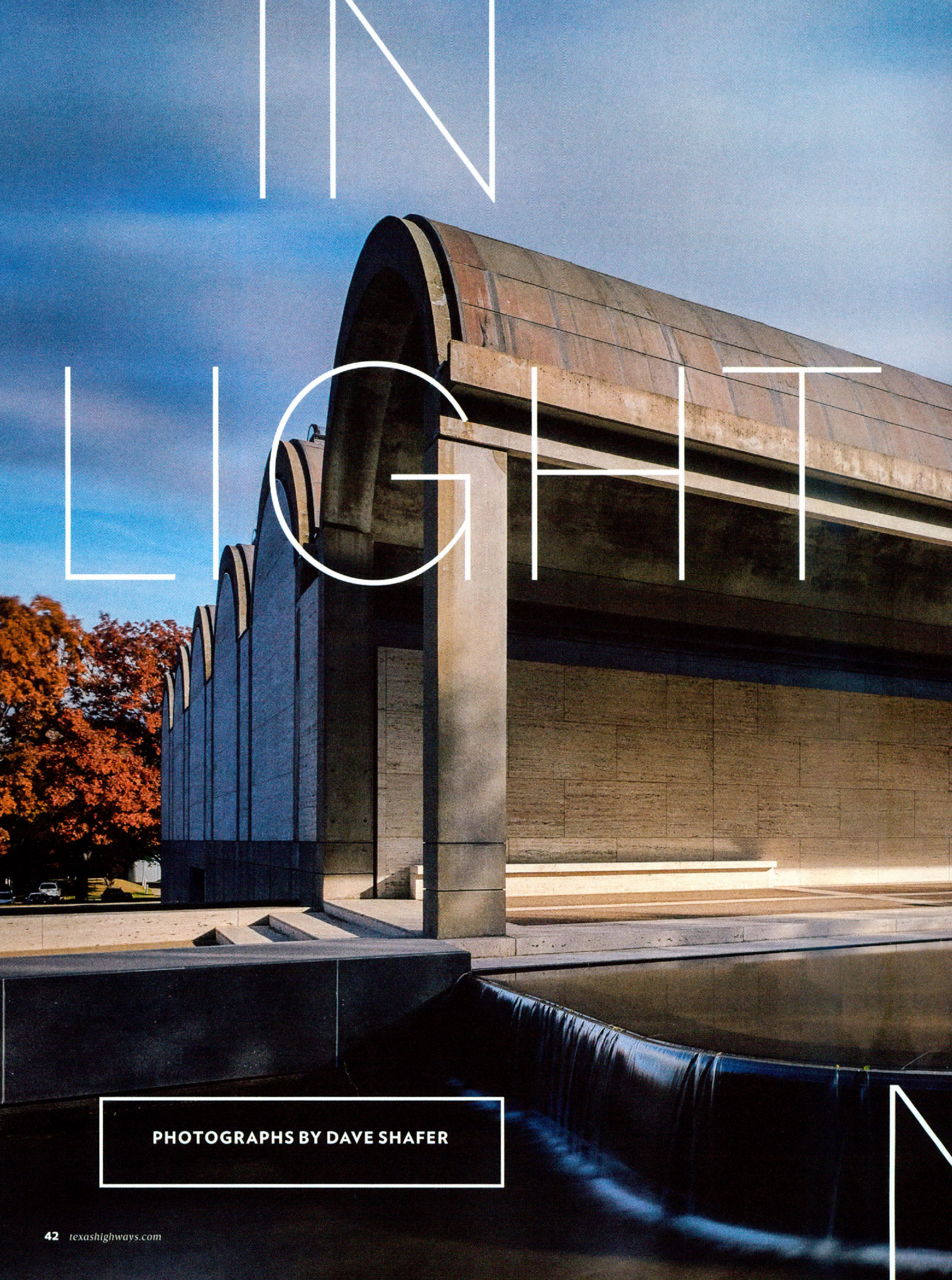
I set my bag down in the shade of a tree. The concrete pavement is hot underfoot as I head to the high dive. Here I have a panoramic view of the vast pool, a desert jewel surrounded by the mountains I just left. I think of the Jumanos and Apaches settling nearby, the men in CCC Company 1856 crafting the pool, laying these stones by hand. I think of what it means for this small West Texas town to have a reason for people to make a pilgrimage of hundreds of miles. A warm wind blows, and I take a deep breath.

The water beckons. I bend my knees and jump. **L**

**BALMORHEA  
STATE PARK**

9207 SH 17, Toyahvale.  
Hours: 8 a.m.–7 p.m. daily;  
reservations are required.  
432-375-2370, [tpwd.texas.gov/  
state-parks/balmorhea](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/balmorhea).  
\$7 entry fee, free for children  
12 and under.





# IN LIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE SHAFER



BY FOWZIA KARIMI

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS, THE KIMBELL ART MUSEUM IS AN ARCHITECTURAL  
MASTERPIECE ON PAR WITH THE ART IT EXHIBITS

NATURE

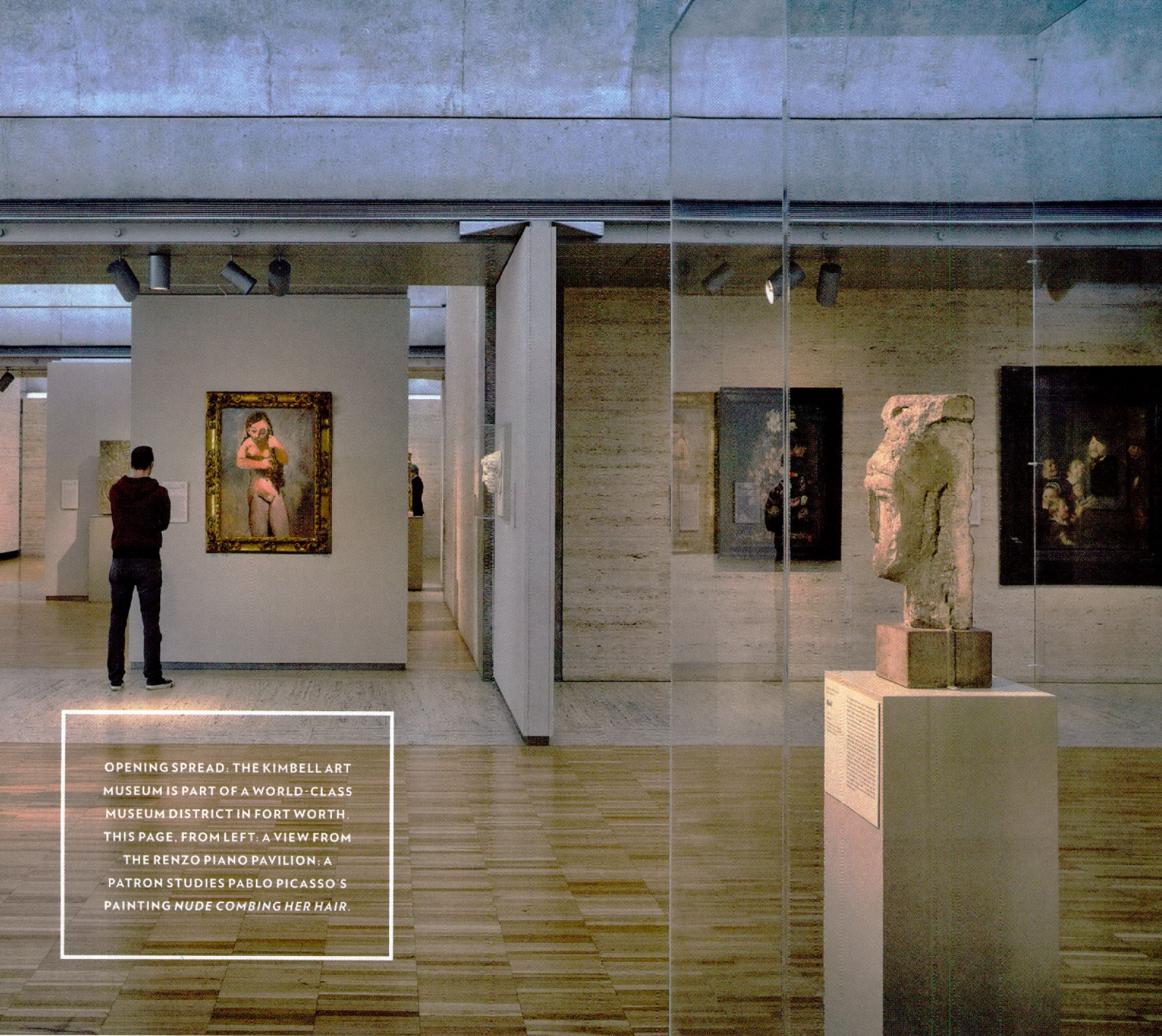




# A BAND SILVER LIGHT

runs along the body of a freshly caught mackerel in Anne Vallayer-Coster's 1787 painting *Still Life with Mackerel*. The Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth acquired the painting in 2019. As I stand before it, admiring the French artist's exquisite sensitivity to her subject, I am aware that another band of silvery light runs over my head. This light, fluid and shifting, is natural light that streams in through narrow 100-foot-long plexiglass skylights. The skylights, running north to south down the length of the gallery's vaulted ceilings, are hidden behind suspended aluminum reflectors that distribute and soften the direct sunlight. The





OPENING SPREAD: THE KIMBELL ART MUSEUM IS PART OF A WORLD-CLASS MUSEUM DISTRICT IN FORT WORTH. THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: A VIEW FROM THE RENZO PIANO PAVILION; A PATRON STUDIES PABLO PICASSO'S PAINTING *NUDE COMBING HER HAIR*.

effect is that of walking beneath a cool wintery sky.

The Kimbell Museum is located in Fort Worth's cultural district in good company with the city's many other riches, among them the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth just across the street, the nearby Amon Carter Museum of American Art, the Bass Performance Hall, and the Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The Kimbell began celebrating its 50th anniversary in October with 50 programs and an exhibit through October 2023, *The Kimbell at 50*, all of which look at half a century of acquisitions, design, special exhibitions, and community engagement.

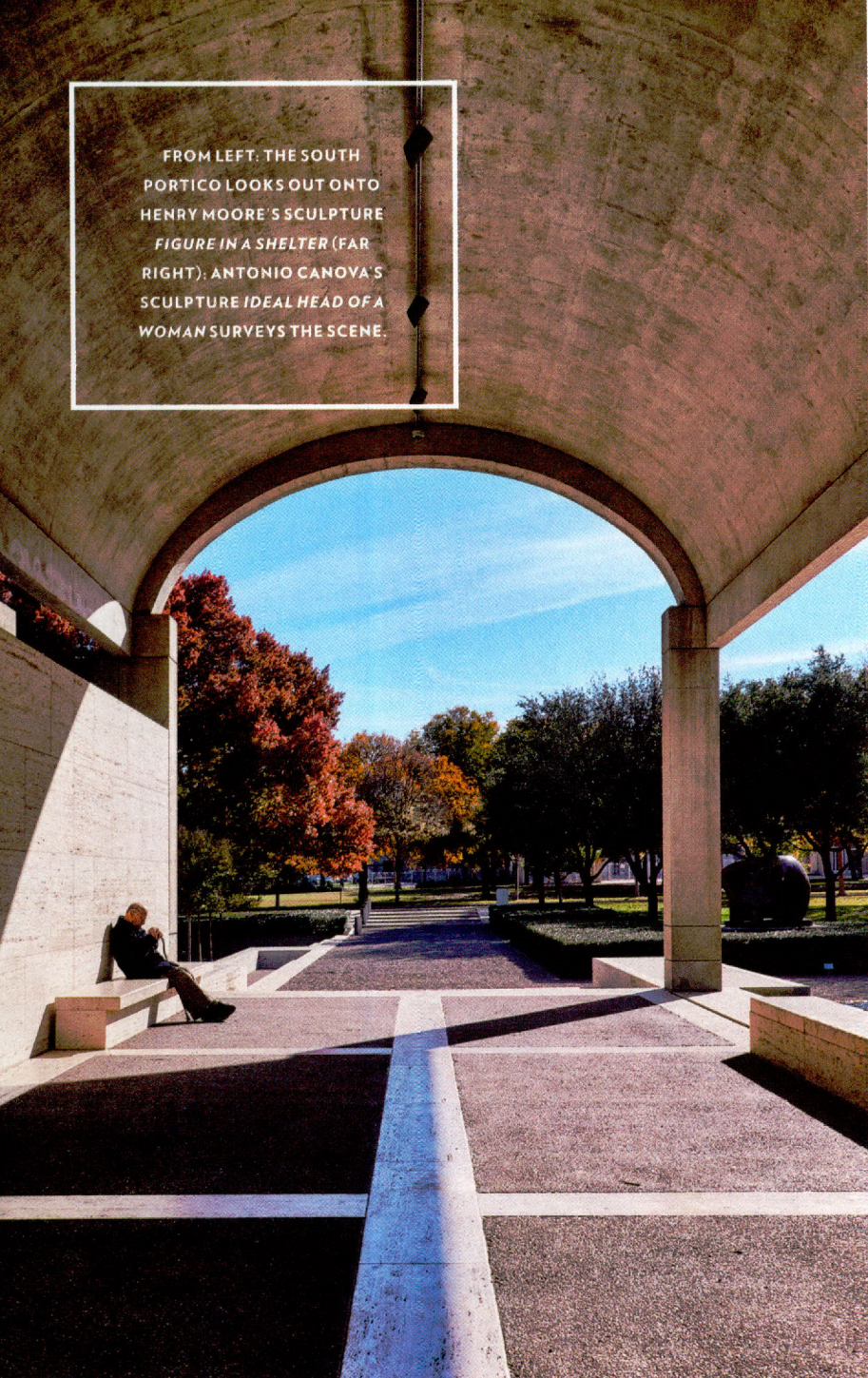
Its art collection is housed in two buildings designed about 40 years apart by renowned architects Louis I. Kahn and Renzo Piano. The buildings opened to the public in 1972 and 2013, respectively. In a setting that is at once urban and

natural, the two complementary but distinct buildings communicate across groves of yaupon hollies and elm trees, with live oaks elsewhere on campus. Museum visitors passing from one structure to the other linger between them to enjoy parklike spaces, which are integral to the museum's design and identity. Nature plays a central role at the Kimbell.

I am regularly drawn to the Kimbell not just for its art—a relatively small, permanent collection of about 350 works that rivals the institutions of many larger cities—but also for Kahn's building itself. I am not an architecture enthusiast; I don't speak the language or know the history. But I am aware enough of spaces and materials to know when a structure speaks to me, when it moves me. Kahn's building influenced me on my first visit. It is quietly monumental. Beyond its function to house art, it is its own masterpiece—perhaps the greatest one at the Kimbell.

While there is a street entrance on the first floor, the proper entrance is the building's stunning west facade, which leads directly into the second-floor





FROM LEFT: THE SOUTH PORTICO LOOKS OUT ONTO HENRY MOORE'S SCULPTURE *FIGURE IN A SHELTER* (FAR RIGHT); ANTONIO CANOYA'S SCULPTURE *IDEAL HEAD OF A WOMAN SURVEYS THE SCENE*.

galleries. Three 100-foot bays with travertine-sheathed walls and concrete vaulted porticos greet visitors. The central recessed portico directs visitors in through a cluster of hollies flanked by two massive basins of smooth, flowing water. Paths lead past light and shadow to a glass-walled entrance. Inside the museum, another 13 parallel concrete cycloid vaults—five deep in each wing, and three deep in the center—make up the three parts of the galleries. Plexiglass skylights run the length of the gallery ceilings, while three interior glass-walled courtyards bring in additional light. Two of the courtyards are accessible and invite the visitor out into the open air, interpolating the contemplation of art with time in nature.

In an unpublished 1972 interview with collaborator Marshall D. Meyers, Kahn spoke about the materials of his new building as if they were alive: "I feel that natural materials have a way of blending together. There's something about nature's making of the materials—somehow there's more sympathy amongst materials, a cross-sympathy of materials in nature..." This

is perhaps most evident in the approach to the building's west entrance, which marks a progression from outside to inside. "The reflecting pools and yaupon hollies help to slow our pace so that we are more attuned to sensory information—the sounds of splashing water, shifting patterns of light and shadow, and once inside, artworks of profound beauty and importance," says Connie Hatchette Barganier, head of education at the Kimbell.

Alicia Villanueva has been a guard at the museum for three years. She says the light in the Kahn building is always in flux, subtly and sometimes drastically changing throughout the day and the seasons, as the sun moves across the sky or as storm clouds move in to block it. "Every day, for me, is a different experience," Villanueva says.

I come to the museum several times a year, and while I do not have the intimate relationship to the space or the artwork that Villanueva has, I share the sentiment. I have my favorite artworks to which I pay a sort of silent pilgrimage on these visits. But I am also regularly surprised by a new work or by one that I've walked by with a simple glance in past years. On this occasion, it is Vallayer-Coster's *Still Life with Mackerel* that attracts my attention.

Vallayer-Coster's painting lures me from a distance, and the closer I move to it, the more transfixed I become. The museum label notes her "magical ability to imitate nature." Indeed, there is an undeniable reality to the scene, and the designation of "still life" here triumphantly earns its name. A pair of stacked mackerel lie atop a plain white linen tablecloth in the foreground of the painting. Light shimmers over their scales and a rainbow of colors—blue, green, gold, rust, scarlet, pink—kisses and saturates the flesh. The shimmery plump fish have such an uncanny presence; they look as though they might slip off the edge of the table and into my hands. Light somehow vivifies a pair of dead fish, and it imbues the rest of the inanimate scene with lucid materiality by imparting a warm flush to cold metal, alternately highlighting or permeating hard glass, or burnishing the crust of a brioche. Of course, there is nothing here except oil paint on canvas, but Vallayer-Coster's brilliant





facility with the medium transports the viewer to the setting.

This desire to imitate nature, to give it a second life in our works of art, is a basic and perennial one. From the beginning, using the materials in our environment—clay, soot, stone, sap, wood, bone, fat, feather—humans have set to sculpting, drawing, painting, and engraving the world around us. Whether for spiritual, cosmological, or aesthetic purposes, we aim to recapture nature in our art.

**In 1998, I made a trip to Kyrgyzstan** to visit my younger sister who was there serving as a Peace Corps volunteer. To show off the country's natural beauty, she took me up to the mountains to stay at Lake Issyk Kul, one of the world's largest and deepest. One afternoon, I walked along the lake among boulders; I watched a goat climb then stand atop a large rock in the distance. In the corner of my eye, something else caught my attention: marks made on the side of a closer rock. I drew near and saw an engraved image of a goat standing in the same exact position, facing the same direction, as the living goat in the distance. I felt myself transported, as

though I was the artist standing before my stone canvas studying the living goat, having just scratched its image onto the boulder. As I walked around, I found other petroglyphs of animals preserved across a stretch of 3,000–4,000 years.

Whether left to the elements under an open sky, or housed in a building designed for the sole purpose of exhibiting art, our very human works of art tell the story of our enthrallment to nature. As I walk through the galleries, it becomes evident that the Kimbell's collection is made up of singularly powerful pieces. There are paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and other objects that originated across the globe and span 5,000 years. Pieces are acquired for their individual and aesthetic value rather than collected to fit stylistic or historical parameters. I can have a moment, or build a relationship, with a work of art that is based on that piece's merits, rather than its position in an artistic movement, or even the artist's larger oeuvre.

"Great works of art tend to look even stronger when seen within the context of the Kimbell's galleries, but weaker works of art tend to be diminished," Museum Director Eric M. Lee says. "Quality is the unifying feature of the Kimbell's varied collection."

The Kahn building, at once grand and restrained, showcases each individual artwork through open spaces, allowing for impressive views of



unexpected objects. “As an educator, I especially appreciate the scale of these spaces,” Hatchette Barganier says. “They don’t overwhelm or intimidate. They welcome and invite us to ease into appreciating artworks through careful looking and conversation.”

When I visit the Kimbell, I enter a state of contemplation as soon as I leave my car. The repeating cycloid vaults, the grids of trees, the materials in regular proportion to one another create a beautiful order. This structural rhythm, this visual echo, evokes reverence. I wish I could visit the building more often to forge the kind of sacred relationship that forms from repeated visits to a beloved site. In our perpetual search for stimulation and novelty today, I think we lose something vital: ritual. We lose cyclical routine; we lose rhythm. These things are built into our biology because we live on a tilted, rotating sphere that revolves around a massive, blazing orb, giving us our days and our seasons. The Kahn building has something of this natural rhythm built into it, with its repeating forms, its elemental materials, and its direct relationship to sunlight. It somehow manages, as nature does, to elate and hush simultaneously.

In my mind, nature reduced to its essence is light. The Kimbell’s materials—among them, travertine, concrete, white oak—combine in harmonious ways to create a structure that is at once monumental and weightless. Light, however, is the museum’s most consequential element. The skylights and the interior courtyards let this essence of nature indoors so that light continuously informs the experience of viewing the other works of art, as well as one’s relationship to the building itself.

**This past summer, I visited Rome** with a friend at the height of tourist season. In 100-degree weather, we wended our way from our hotel, among droves of tourists, down streets congested with traffic, to the Pantheon. Once there, we waited in a long line outside the ancient, colossal building, admiring its portico, remarking on its incongruous size and age among the surrounding buildings. We patiently took in the scene and the multitudes. Finally, the guards herded us through the portico and into the building. It wasn’t until we were packed in that I was finally able to look up at the massive concrete dome overhead. I don’t know whether everyone else also fell silent at that moment, or whether the profound beauty of the space smothered all of my senses but my sight.

One hundred and forty-two feet overhead, the

THE SOUTH GALLERY  
BATHES IN SILVERY  
BLUE LIGHT  
RADIATING FROM A  
PLEXIGLASS SKYLIGHT.



oculus at the top of the dome—a circular opening with a diameter of 27 feet—revealed a brilliant blue sky. This made me feel unmistakably human and small yet connected to something powerful and sacred. A pigeon flew into and out of the oculus. The sky, taken for granted when we’d been outside just moments before, became a formidable and keen presence now that we were inside the building. It felt as though the blue sky watched us with its oculus, as aware of us as we were of it. I understood immediately, on a visceral level, the purpose of the building. This temple built to house “all the gods” has for nearly 2,000 years, through eras of pagan and Christian worship, fulfilled its function.

Kahn’s work was inspired by ancient Roman and Greek architecture and ruins. The influence is visible in his design for the Kimbell. But it is one thing to be influenced by those ancient buildings and quite another to conjure their spirit in the modern world. Somehow, Kahn manages this and the Kimbell functions as a temple to masterpieces. “As many times as I have been here, and every season of the year, walking into this building, every time it’s a lift,” says Len Schweitzer, a docent who has led tours at the museum for 31 years.

Perhaps the work I visit most often, and usually circle back to before I leave, is





# EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Visit the Kimbell Art Museum for five must-see works from the permanent collection. 3333 Camp Bowie Blvd., Fort Worth. [kimbellart.org](http://kimbellart.org)

**THE TORMENT OF SAINT ANTHONY, 1487** Considered the first painting by Michelangelo, this masterful work was completed when he was only 12 or 13 years of age.

**RED-FIGURE CUP SHOWING THE DEATH OF PENTHEUS AND A MAENAD, C. 480 B.C.** This Ancient Greek ceramic presents gruesome violence in an elegant package, with delicate line drawings depicting the mythical king Pentheus being torn to pieces by Theban women.

**BOWL WITH PAMPAS GRASS DESIGN, EARLY 18TH CENTURY** Japanese potter Ogata Kenzan's ceramic celebrates the charms of nature with its airy brushwork and use of vivid green and earthy brown glazes.

**XIPE TOTEC, C. 900-1200** The sculpture of the Aztec god of spring and regeneration at once embodies a grown man and a newborn child, life and death, wrapped in the flayed skin of a sacrificial victim.

**WEeping WILLOW, 1918-19** Claude Monet painted this portrayal of a garden in mourning during his later years and at the end of World War I.

Caspar David Friedrich's 1835 painting *Mountain Peak with Drifting Clouds*. For a small landscape—it measures about 10 by 12 inches—the work creates a substantial effect on the viewer. Friedrich is a German Romantic painter whose symbolic work focuses on nature. *Mountain Peak with Drifting Clouds* is one of a handful of his pieces in an American collection. It does not feature the expansive vistas of some of his larger works, but its small stature coaxes intimacy and invites contemplation, fostering a kind of silent dialogue with the elements in the mountain-cape. The eye moves from a horizontal downed tree trunk in the foreground, to living vertical trees in the mid-ground, across a drifting body of clouds, to a distant mountain peak. At each spot where the eye rests—whether on decaying branches, upright conifers, or soft clouds—the mind stirs.

I can stand before this quiet work for long moments, regarding one or another object or area in the small painting, moved to deep understanding not by thought or language but by nature's symbology. While the painting guides the eye from foreground to background, it also ushers it upward. The pointed treetops and pointed mountain peak finally guide the eye up and out of the frame, figuratively, to an imagined sky overhead and, literally, to the Kimbell's silvery blue light. **L**





# SACRED

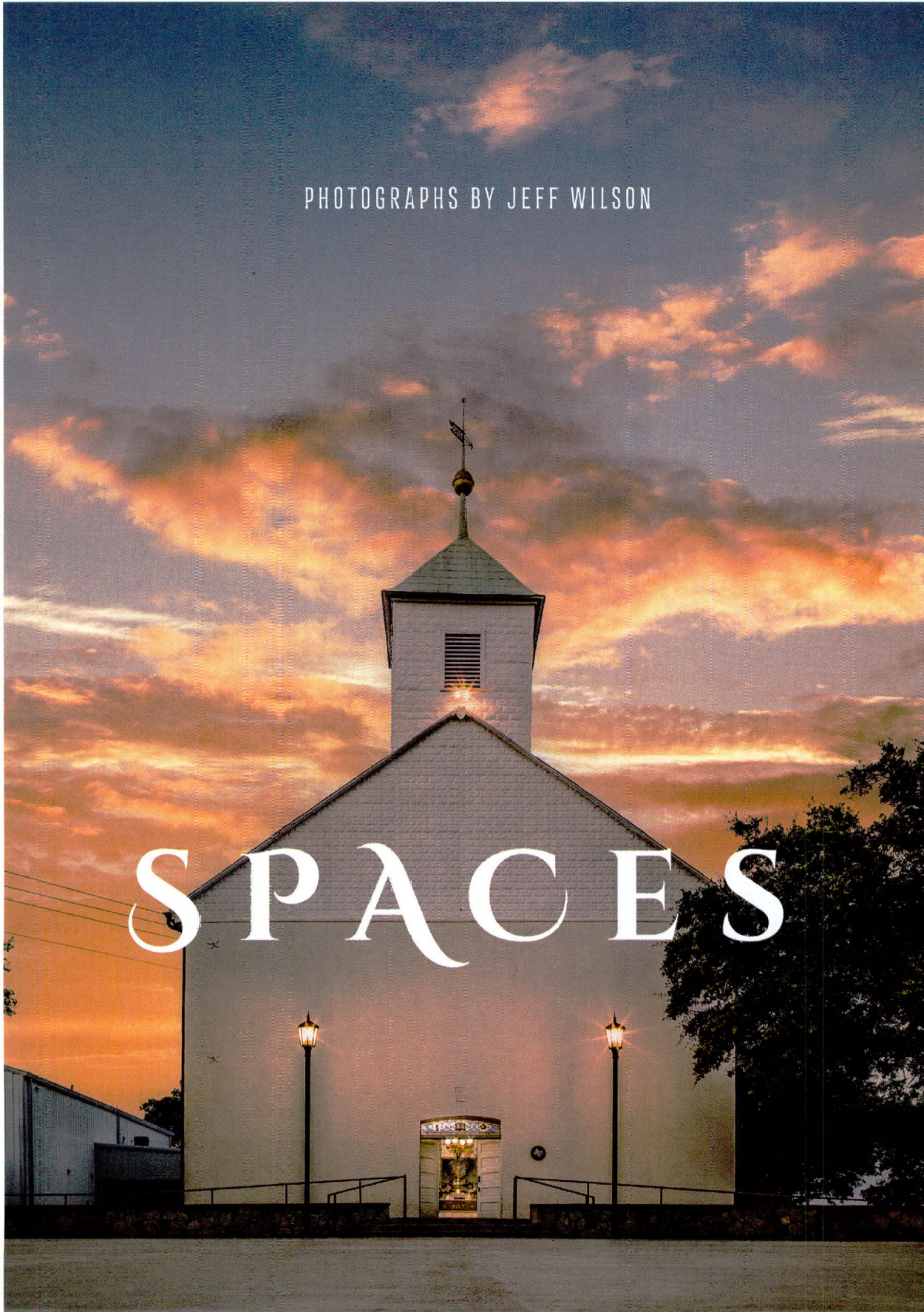
FIND DIVINE  
INSPIRATION AND  
QUIET REFLECTION  
IN TEXAS'  
TRANSCENDENT  
LANDMARKS





PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF WILSON

# SPACES





# FROM THE ANCIENT CHISOS

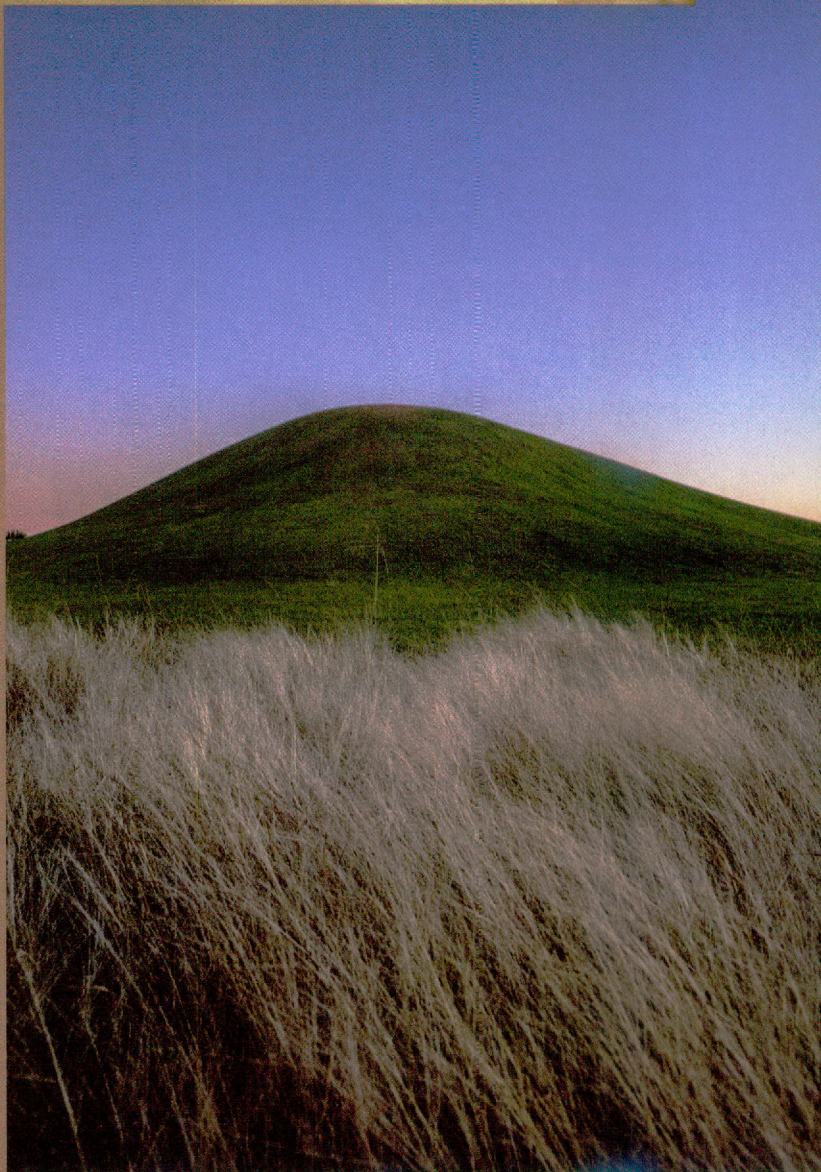
Mountains to the majestic Piney Woods to the roar of waves crashing on the South Padre Island shore, Texas' natural wonders offer no shortage of grandeur. But there's beauty to be found in the human-made structures that surround us, too. The places we construct for prayer, meditation, remembrance, or rumination reveal our human attempts to define the undefinable.

Whether it's temples, churches, or cultural sites, Texas has an abundance of places that offer visitors, religious or not, a space to reflect in an increasingly noisy world. Austin-based photographer Jeff Wilson says he has always been interested in these outward expressions of people's faith. "It can be really powerful and insightful into how people think," he says. "You can see what their faith looks like built out of brick and mortar."

Over the course of one month, Wilson traveled to nearly every region of Texas capturing some of the state's most sacred spaces. There are the religious, like the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio; and the secular, like Houston's Rothko Chapel. In all, he visited seven cities, including El Paso, Alto in East Texas, and San Juan in the Rio Grande Valley. Photographing inanimate structures is different from capturing live subjects, he says. "The work itself is solitary and contemplative."

Wilson spent hours with each structure, photographing each one at dusk and dawn, determining how they fit into the environment around them. To get a feel for what he wanted to shoot, he'd put his camera down and walk around, waiting for what the space had to reveal. "The architecture of these different places is so varied, in terms of their age and expression," he says. "They're really interesting when you start to piece them together."

—Danielle Lopez



## CADDO MOUNDS STATE HISTORIC SITE

SITUATED IN THE PINEY WOODS OF EAST TEXAS, Caddo Mounds comprises three earthen mounds that once served as a flourishing settlement for the Indigenous Caddo people roughly 1,300 years ago. The Caddo built each mound for a different purpose: one to build a temple, one as a burial site, and one as ceremonial grounds. "I've been all around that area of Texas, but somehow this was my first time seeing the Caddo Mounds," Wilson says. After a tornado tore through much of the site in 2019, local Texans, with the help of Caddo, began working to restore the area. During Wilson's visit, they were working on a new visitors center and museum and rebuilding a replica of a traditional grass house, which was recently completed.

1649 SH 21 West, Alto. 936-858-3218;

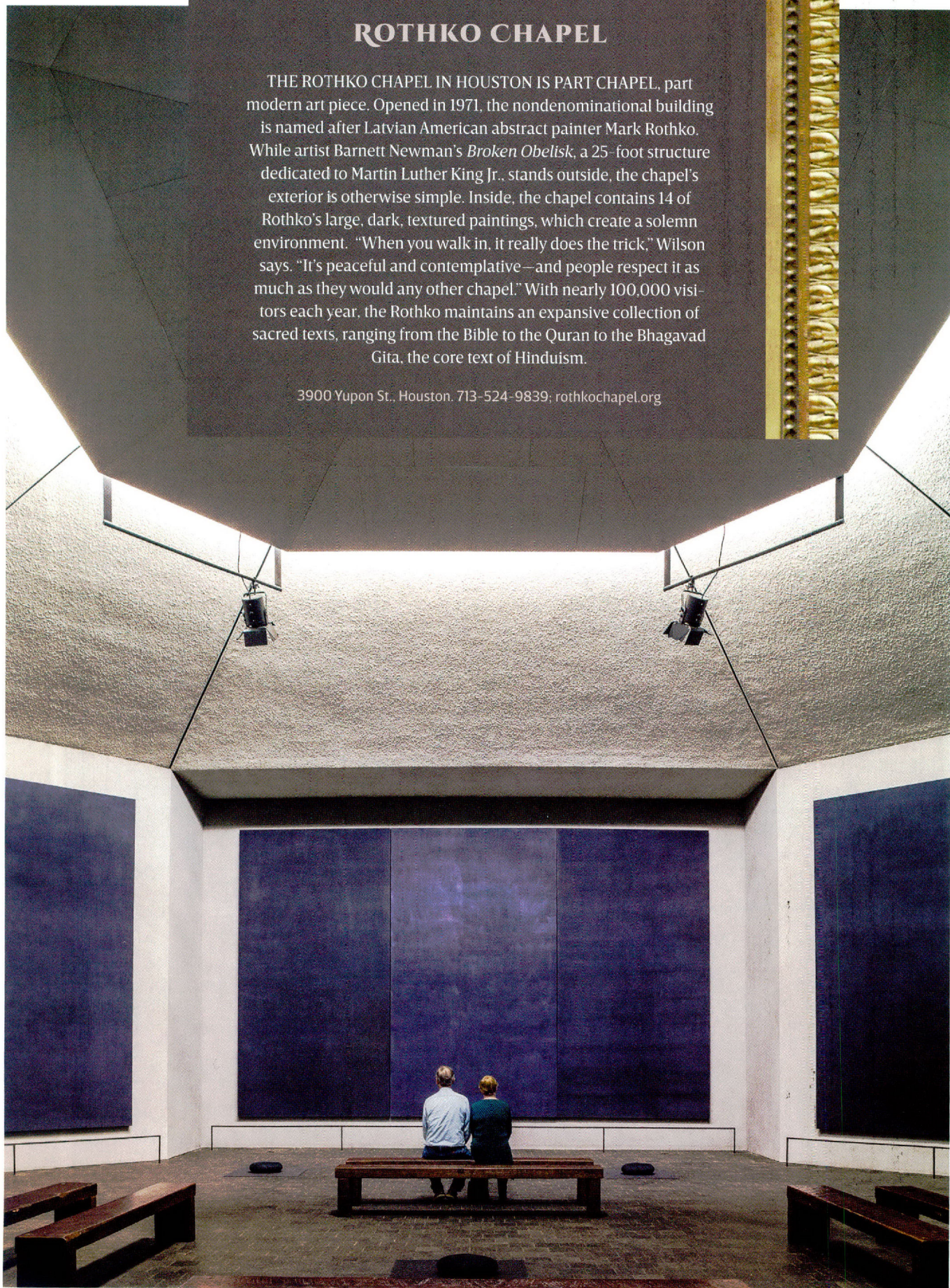
[thc.texas.gov/historic-sites/caddo-mounds-state-historic-site](http://thc.texas.gov/historic-sites/caddo-mounds-state-historic-site)



## ROTHKO CHAPEL

THE ROTHKO CHAPEL IN HOUSTON IS PART CHAPEL, part modern art piece. Opened in 1971, the nondenominational building is named after Latvian American abstract painter Mark Rothko. While artist Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk*, a 25-foot structure dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr., stands outside, the chapel's exterior is otherwise simple. Inside, the chapel contains 14 of Rothko's large, dark, textured paintings, which create a solemn environment. "When you walk in, it really does the trick," Wilson says. "It's peaceful and contemplative—and people respect it as much as they would any other chapel." With nearly 100,000 visitors each year, the Rothko maintains an expansive collection of sacred texts, ranging from the Bible to the Quran to the Bhagavad Gita, the core text of Hinduism.

3900 Yupon St., Houston. 713-524-9839; rothkochapel.org





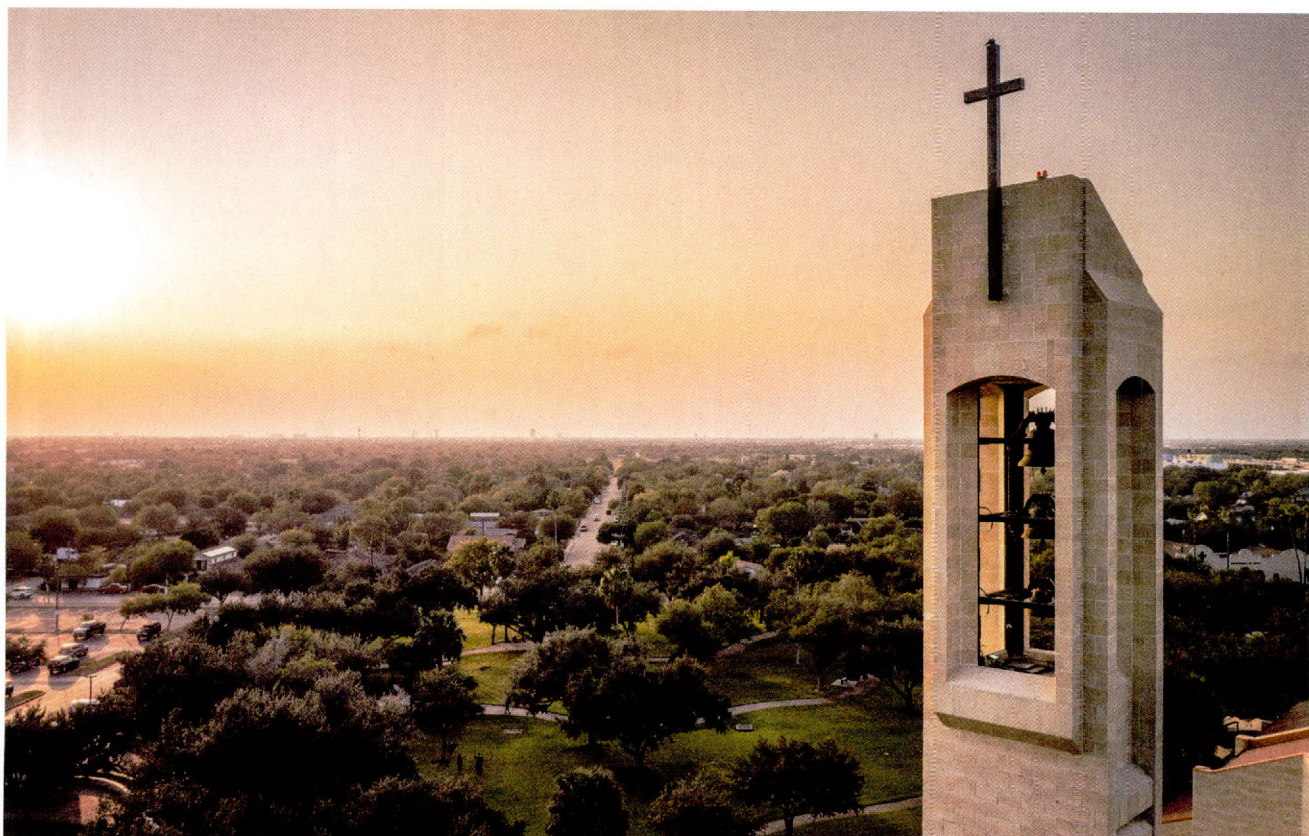




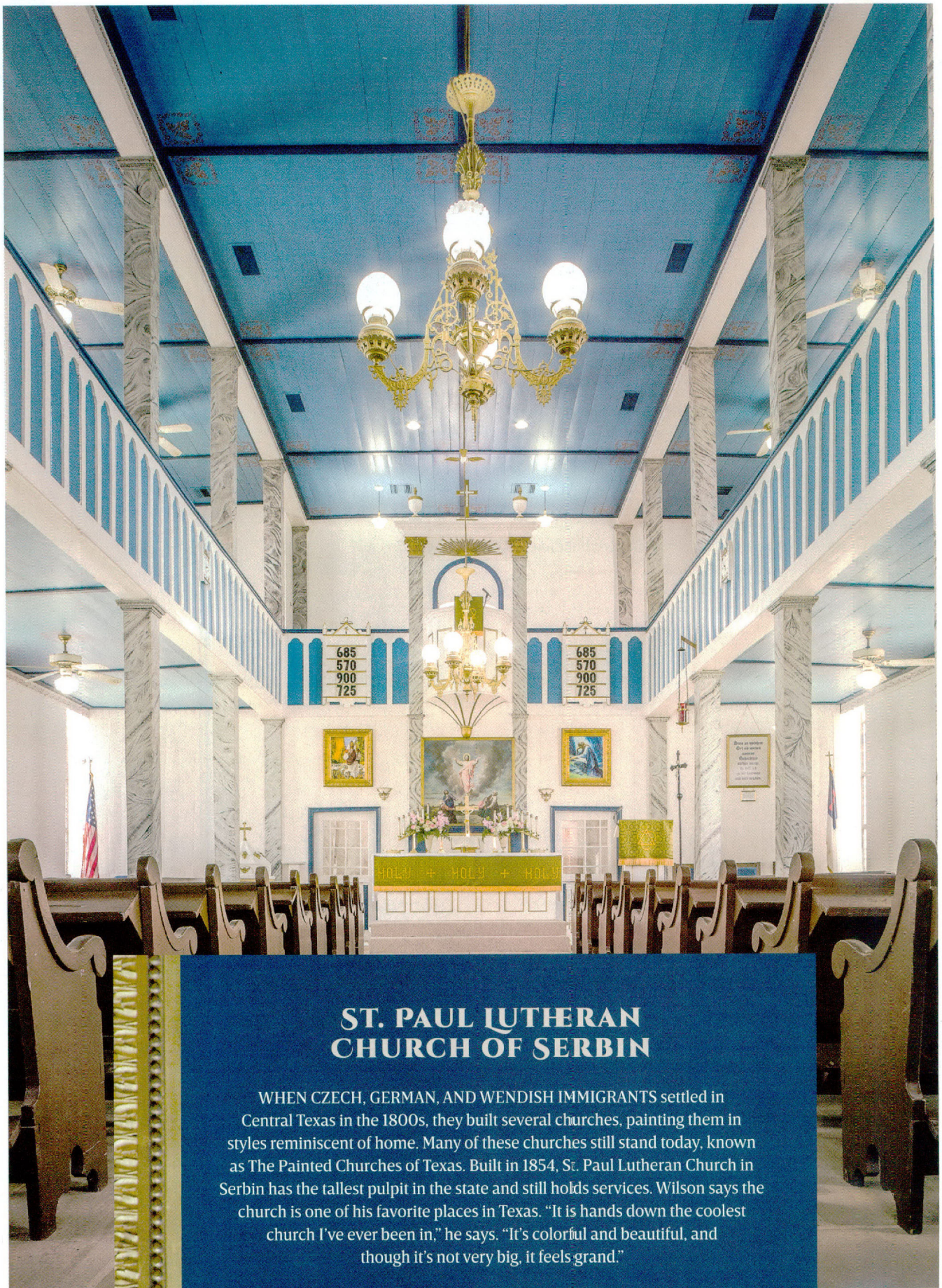
## BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF SAN JUAN DEL VALLE

THIS NATIONAL SHRINE welcomes roughly a million visitors each year who come to pray, light candles, and roam the 55,000-square-foot campus. “It feels like an old Catholic church,” Wilson says. “It’s very grand and ornate.” Deemed a minor basilica of the Catholic Church, the shrine is named after “La Virgen de San Juan,” an iteration of the Virgin Mary that originated in the Mexican town of San Juan de los Lagos. It is said that in the early 1600s a young girl came back from the dead after her parents placed the image of the Virgin Mary over her. Since then, people have sought out La Virgen’s help. People’s faith in her grew stronger in 1970 after a plane crashed into the shrine’s original structure while 50 parish priests were inside the church and 100 children were in the school next door. All of them survived. The current building was opened in 1980.

400 N. Virgen de San Juan Blvd., San Juan.  
956-787-0033; [olsjbasilica.org](http://olsjbasilica.org)







## ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SERBIN

WHEN CZECH, GERMAN, AND WENDISH IMMIGRANTS settled in Central Texas in the 1800s, they built several churches, painting them in styles reminiscent of home. Many of these churches still stand today, known as The Painted Churches of Texas. Built in 1854, St. Paul Lutheran Church in Serbin has the tallest pulpit in the state and still holds services. Wilson says the church is one of his favorite places in Texas. "It is hands down the coolest church I've ever been in," he says. "It's colorful and beautiful, and though it's not very big, it feels grand."

1572 County Road 211, Giddings. 979-366-9650; [stpaulserbin.org](http://stpaulserbin.org)



## QUEEN OF PEACE SHRINE AND GARDENS

FOLLOWING THE VIETNAM WAR, thousands of Vietnamese refugees arrived in Texas, many of whom settled in the Golden Triangle—an area between the cities of Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange. The refugees who made a home in Port Arthur created the Queen of Peace church in 1977. To honor those who escaped Vietnam and thank the town for welcoming them, members of the church created the Queen of Peace Shrine and Gardens in 1983. The site features a large statue of the Virgin Mary and the Stations of the Cross, a 14-step devotional depicting Jesus' final days on Earth. Throughout the hours Wilson was there, he noted numerous people came in to pray at different monuments. "The whole garden feels somber," Wilson says. "The Vietnamese Christians have a very dedicated community there."

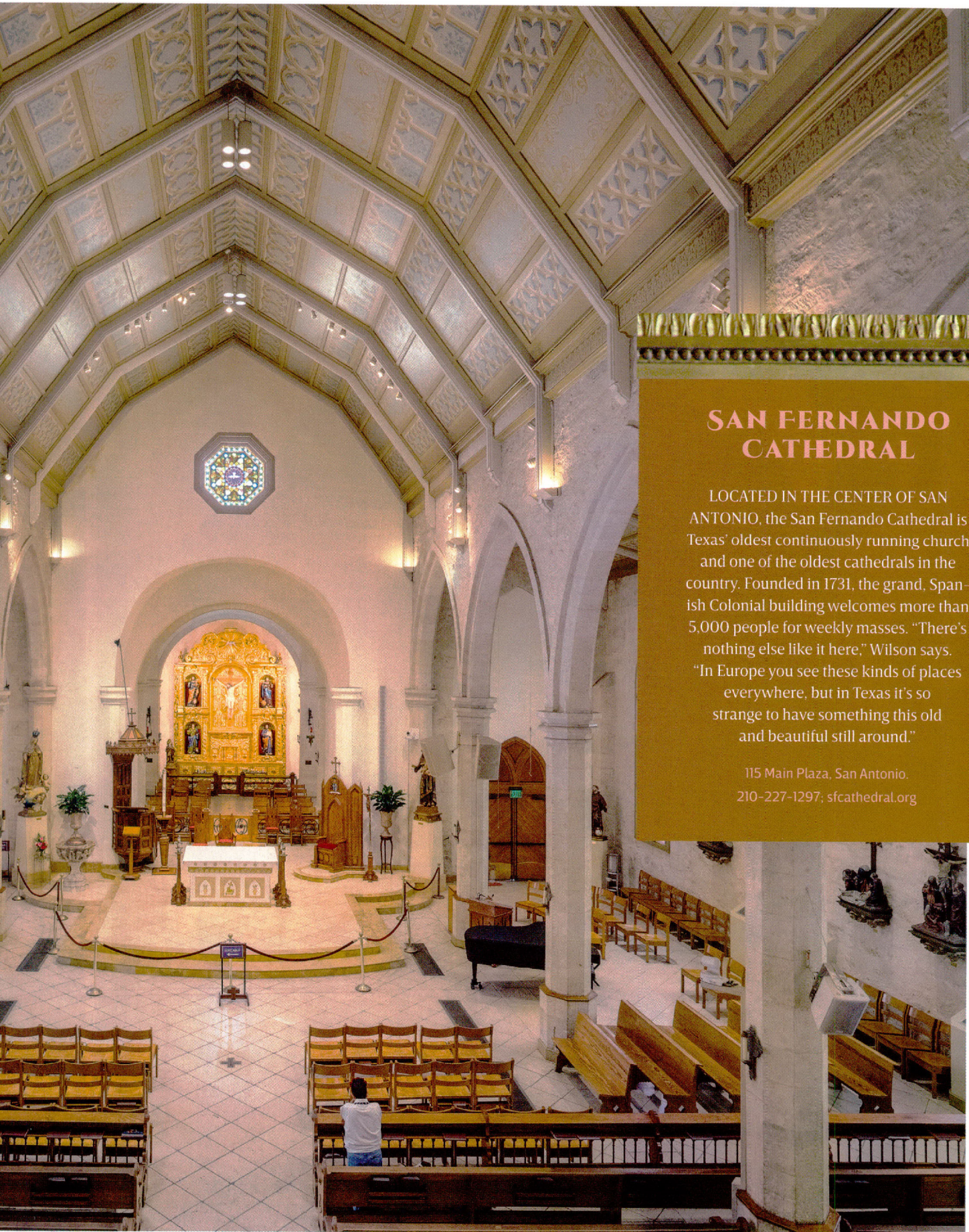
801 Ninth Ave., Port Arthur. 409-983-7676; [gxnuvuongportarthur.org](http://gxnuvuongportarthur.org)











## SAN FERNANDO CATHEDRAL

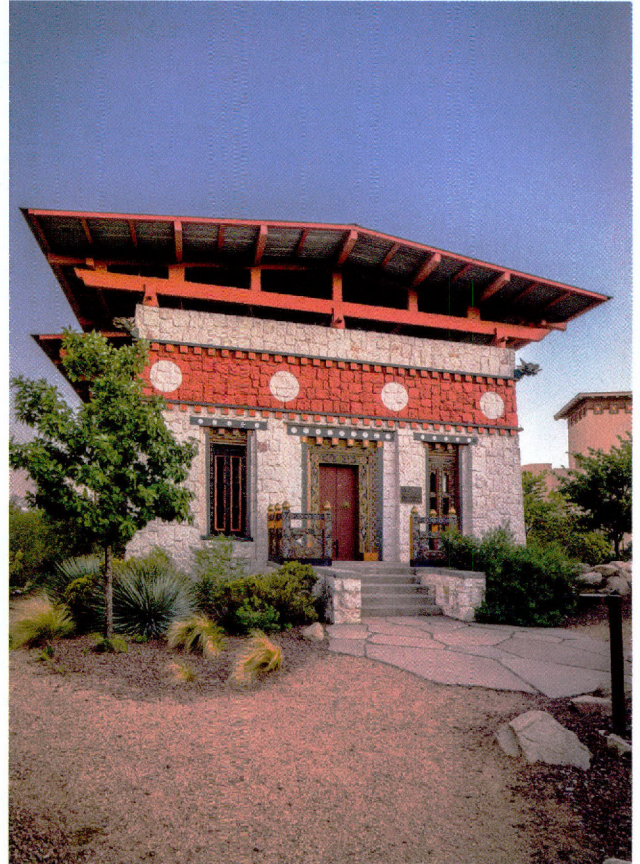
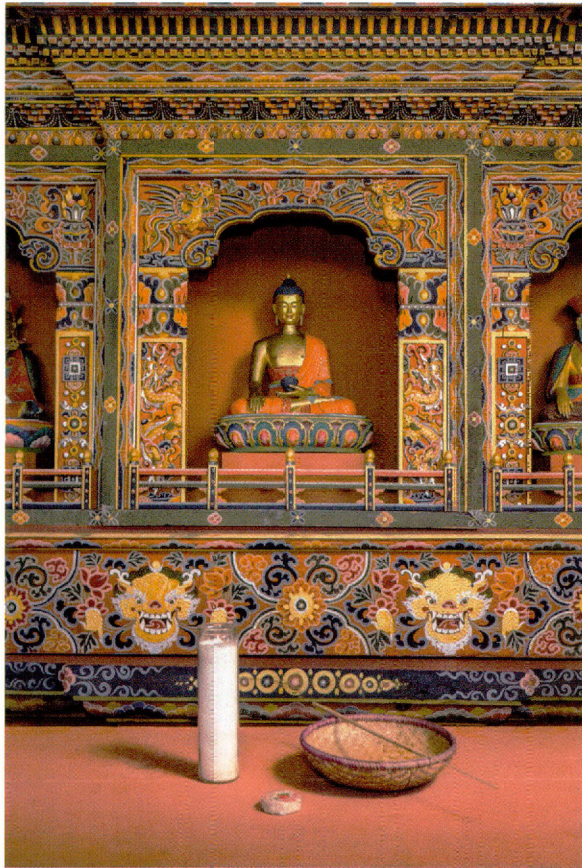
LOCATED IN THE CENTER OF SAN ANTONIO, the San Fernando Cathedral is Texas' oldest continuously running church and one of the oldest cathedrals in the country. Founded in 1731, the grand, Spanish Colonial building welcomes more than 5,000 people for weekly masses. "There's nothing else like it here," Wilson says. "In Europe you see these kinds of places everywhere, but in Texas it's so strange to have something this old and beautiful still around."

115 Main Plaza, San Antonio.  
210-227-1297; [sfcathedral.org](http://sfcathedral.org)









## THE LHAKHANG

IN 1914, *National Geographic* published the first photos of the South Asian kingdom of Bhutan released in the U.S. The wife of the dean of what would become the University of Texas at El Paso became infatuated with the country's architecture, leading the school's construction to be built in traditional Bhutanese style. "I had never been on campus before, and I was blown away by how cool it looks," Wilson says. "The architecture is stunning." Throughout the years, the university and the remote Himalayan country's relationship has deepened. That's why, in 2008, the kingdom of Bhutan gifted the school with the "Lhakhang," a small building in the center of campus in the style of a Bhutanese Buddhist temple. Though "lhakhang" translates to "temple" in English, the structure is not a place of worship. Rather the Bhutanese consider lhakhangs to be a center for contemplative reflection. 🏠

500 W. University Ave., El Paso. 915-747-5565;  
[utep.edu/centennial-museum/lhakhang/index.html](http://utep.edu/centennial-museum/lhakhang/index.html)



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# PLATES



## SUNDAY SUPPER

Club's paté is paired with toasted pistachios and torched figs.



# Sunday Supper

Themed monthly dinner parties are the hot ticket in the small town of Van

By June Naylor

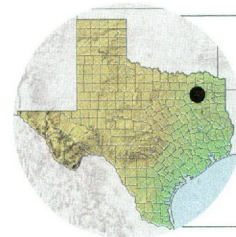
Diners attend the Sunday Supper Club in October.

Inside a converted barn with a rustic wood interior, 40 people gather just in time for supper in the tiny East Texas town of Van. Guests sip on wine, enjoying their five-course meal around three long tables adorned with tapered candles, fine china, and elegant flower arrangements. On this late October night, the menu includes paté paired with toasted pistachios, torched figs, and pomegranate reduction; followed by roasted quail with apple, leek, and fennel stuffing.

Though the menu changes, a similar scene plays out one evening each month at The Farmhouse, a mom and pop restaurant just off Interstate 20, about 25 miles northwest of Tyler. The gastronomic affair, featuring dishes more readily available at big-city restaurants, goes by the downhome name of Sunday Supper Club and is BYOB. Begun in early 2022, the popular new offering often sells out as soon as tickets—which run about \$50-\$58—are announced on social media.

Born out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supper Club surprises with a bounty of fine cuisine in a transformed family restaurant. The event was created by self-taught chef and Fort Worth-based event planner Jennifer Ellison and her mother, Janine Ellison. “We were talking during COVID about how people hadn’t been gathering and how much they missed it,” Jennifer says. “Mom and I wanted to figure out how to bring people together over good food and conversation in Van.”

Supper clubs have been around since the days of Prohibition and are most popular in the Midwest. Lawrence Frank—a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the creator of Lawry’s Seasoned Salt—is credited with having opened the first supper club in California in the 1930s. Eventually, the concept reached his home state. They were often held on the edges of small towns, used as a gathering place folks could inconspicuously consume their alcohol. In recent years,



**THE FARMHOUSE**  
1125 S. Oak St., Van.  
903-963-7077;  
thefarmhousevantx.com  
Open Mon-Sat  
7 a.m.-8 p.m.

supper clubs have gained popularity nationally and are more akin to pop-up events combining upscale experiences with fine dining. Variations of the supper club can be found around Texas, like the recently opened RR12 Supper Club of Wimberley or Magdalena’s in Fort Worth.

Janine and Jennifer already had an ideal venue for the Supper Club in The Farmhouse. The barn, which was once part of a dairy farm, belongs to Janine. She opened the comfort food eatery known for homemade rolls, chicken-fried steak, and buttermilk-pecan pie nearly 20 years ago with her late husband and Jennifer’s dad, Charles.



When the duo first launched the Supper Club, they were nervous. “We wondered what people would be willing to pay for a dinner like this, and would they like it?” Jennifer recalls. Nineteen guests came to the inaugural Sunday Supper in February 2022. The mother-daughter team offered guests a discount for the March and April dinners if they signed up that night, and much to the Ellisons’ delight, they all did. Most even brought new guests with them upon return. “I think we were somewhat tame with our menus at first—although we had caviar on our very first menu, which was definitely something special,” Jennifer says.

Guests, many of whom show up for birthday or anniversary celebrations, or simply a girls’ night out, come from Van and nearby towns like Bullard, Ben Wheeler, and Tyler, as well as Dallas, Fort Worth, and even Oklahoma. Jennifer and Janine plan the menu more than a month in advance and, since the venue doesn’t serve alcohol, send out wine suggestions to guests a week before the event.

Jennifer serves as executive chef, with Janine doubling as sous chef and pastry chef, and the two work all day Saturday and Sunday of supper weekend in the kitchen. The regular Farmhouse kitchen staff helps out, too, donning black chef coats and pants to serve as waitstaff in the dining room.

Changing Supper Club menus over the past year have featured venison-pecan tamales; butter-poached lobster and shrimp enchiladas; beef tenderloin with chimichurri sauce; watermelon-cucumber gazpacho; crostini with crab, crème fraiche, mint, basil pesto, and sweet peas; and chocolate tres leches cake. Many of Jennifer’s dishes are inspired by her travels. A particular hit on the March menu was her chicken scarpariello, a combination of chicken, sausage, vinegar, onions, and peppers, recreated from a favorite dinner in now-shuttered Rao’s in Las Vegas.

Whenever possible, Jennifer sources ingredients from area producers, including Red Moon Farm in Van, Saxon Farms in Ben Wheeler, and Vertigrow Produce in Waxahachie.

Brenda Kellam, a retired Van High School teacher, quickly became a regular at the Supper Club after friends raved over the first dinner. “It’s such a unique evening for a little town like ours,” Kellam says. “It’s wonderful to try things we’ve never tasted before. It reminds me of special, multiple course dinners I’ve had in Europe and finding wines to go with each course. How lucky are we to have this in Van?”

Another devotee is Denise Wells, a Mineola resident who retired to East Texas from Fort Worth in 2019. “We were so delighted to find a supper club here,” says Wells, who misses the upscale dining common in Dallas-Fort Worth. “It’s nothing like we expected to find once we moved.”

Jennifer says she’s growing more comfortable introducing unusual food ideas to the Sunday Supper guests. Keeping the guest count between 40 to 45 people assures an intimate setting, giving

diners a chance to make new friends with those at their table, Jennifer notes. Though costs to produce the monthly event keep the Supper Club from being a huge moneymaker, Jennifer says that was never the point.

“It’s really a passion project,” she says. “It’s such a creative outlet for my mom and me, and we love working together. The Farmhouse motto is ‘from our family to yours,’ and this supper club is an extension of that.”

**Sunday Supper Club** happens monthly at The Farmhouse. Each event’s date, menu, and tickets are posted about four weeks in advance on Facebook, [facebook.com/thefarmhousevan](https://facebook.com/thefarmhousevan), Instagram [@thefarmhousevantx](https://instagram.com/thefarmhousevantx), and the restaurant’s website [thefarmhousevantx.com](https://thefarmhousevantx.com). Tickets range from \$50-\$58.



Clockwise from top left: The Farmhouse in Van; Jennifer and Janine Ellison; roasted quail.





From left: Original canned Ro-Tel tomatoes; Lady Bird Johnson's King Ranch Casserole.

# Canned Goodness

Ro-Tel's Rio Grande Valley origin story

By Omar L. Gallaga

A small South Texas town of about 5,700 may seem an unlikely birthplace for a brand synonymous with Super Bowl parties and Southern casseroles.

But Elsa, about 25 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, is where Ro-Tel's

popular canned tomatoes and peppers originated. Though production moved out of state in the late 1990s, the popular brand persists, producing tens of millions of cans each year. Ro-Tel (stylized as RO\*TEL on the cans) was founded by Elsa's Carl Roettele in 1943. The vegetable

canner-turned-entrepreneur combined locally grown tomatoes and green chiles and canned them for decades in two area factories—one in Elsa and the other in Donna. Roettele helped simplify the process of roasting, peeling, chopping, and cooking the vegetables for many home cooks who were making chili recipes and cheese-based concoctions that were popular throughout Texas midcentury.

The ties to the South Texas town were strong in those early days, says Jaime Gutierrez, a grant coordinator for the City of Elsa who has been researching Ro-Tel's local roots. "It was canned by the Elsa Canning Company, and for a long time they were one of the major employers here in Elsa," he says. "If you were downwind from it, you could smell the jalapeños cooking."

Though the Elsa area was settled by ranchers before the 1800s, the town itself was incorporated in 1930 when the population was only around 400. Named after Elsa George, the wife of a local landowner, the town was a railroad company city, laid out on the Texas and New Orleans Railroad in the late 1920s. "We grew the tomatoes and the onions here," Gutierrez says. "Everything that went into that sauce, we grew it here, and they used the railroad to transport it."

Ro-Tel began to reach larger Texas cities including San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas. But it exploded in popularity in 1963 when Lady Bird Johnson included it in her Pedernales Chili recipe published in *The Washington Post*.

"She talked about Ro-Tel being the secret ingredient in her recipe," says Dan Skinner, the brand communication manager and Ro-Tel historian at Conagra Brands, the company that has owned Ro-Tel since 2002. "By that time, it was being sold in border states like Arkansas and Oklahoma. That was its first national exposure, and then the brand really took off and grew from there."



Johnson's recipe called for chili meat, garlic, onion, chili powder, cumin, oregano, a dash of hot sauce, and, of course, canned tomatoes.

Elsa's canning factory was still in operation well into the 1990s, but ties to the Roettele family disappeared as Ro-Tel changed ownership over the years. Companies including International Home Foods and American Home Products owned Ro-Tel before Conagra bought it. Conagra is not in touch with descendants of Roettele, Skinner says.

Over the years, Conagra has added new varieties to the product line, including hot and mild. Today, the tomatoes and peppers in Ro-Tel are grown in states outside of Texas.

Still, Ro-Tel remains a staple in Texas households, where queso and salsa are mainstays of the state's Tex-Mex cuisine. The high-profile product is also used in recipes for mac and cheese, burgers, pasta dishes, and many slow-cooker meals. Searches for Ro-Tel recipes have had risen sharply in the last five years, coinciding with the popularity of the Instant Pot cooker and home cooking during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Skinner says.

Ro-Tel-based queso recipes have a dedicated website at [quesoforall.com](http://quesoforall.com). In 2013, and for a few years after, the brand debuted its "Quesobago" truck (think a blockier version of the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile) that traveled to states like Florida, Michigan, and Iowa. Though the Quesobago is not currently touring, the queso website still offers recipes and meal ideas.

Meanwhile, Elsa officials are working on plans to honor the town's ties to Ro-Tel's origin story. As part of the redevelopment of an abandoned railroad site into a park, a small water tower will be painted to look like a can of Ro-Tel, Gutierrez says.

"Elsa was the birthplace of the Ro-Tel product," he says. "People should know about it." 🐾

## Presidential Plate

After mentioning Ro-Tel in an interview, Lady Bird Johnson is credited with putting the canned tomato brand on the U.S. map in the early 1960s. The former first lady was known to use Ro-Tel in a few recipes, including her King Ranch Casserole. This simple dish, which serves six, comes from Johnson's recipe archives at the LBJ Library and Museum in Austin.

### KING RANCH CASSEROLE

- ¼ cup margarine
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 10 oz. can Ro-Tel tomatoes
- 110.5 oz. can cream of chicken soup
- 110.5 oz. can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 10 corn tortillas
- 2 cups diced cooked chicken
- 1 cup grated Colby cheese

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. In a large saucepan, melt margarine over medium heat. Add onion and cook until transparent. Add tomatoes, soups, and stock. Cook, stirring until thickened. In a large flat casserole dish, layer tortillas, chicken, and sauce. Top with cheese and bake 30 minutes.





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PHOTOS: Will van Overbeek

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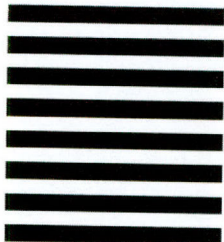
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continued from Page 17

I'm sitting in the vestibule of the Faust Hotel on the morning of my departure last September, staring at the large, framed, replica painting of the bearded man with a pronounced mustache. The self-serve coffee station is set up in front of him at this early hour. This was my first visit since the book event in 2019, and I purposely waited until my final day to discover who he is. When I ask the concierge behind the original 1929 cash register, I learn it's a portrait of the man who started it all: Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels himself, who never returned to New Braunfels after his marriage in Germany, the same year he established the city.

I think about Goethe and Faust: an artist and his creation. I think about the devil, Mephistopheles, and the German immigrants who moved here, carrying Goethe's books in German to bring something of the homeland that no longer welcomed them to the frontier known as Tejas. Eyeing Prince Carl up and down, I ask him what kind of big plans he had out here. Why start a new German state way out this way? Art and literature move us in unexpected ways, sometimes inspiring us to do things we could never have imagined on our own. It'd brought me to New Braunfels, chasing little missed connections with Goethe's *Faust*. Something similar must have happened to Prince Carl when he was in the cavalry and first read about Texas, then decided it was the place he and his fellow Germans needed to be.

I came out here to find something about the devil but end up thinking of the character Dr. Faust, who has something of Goethe, of Prince Carl, of Lindheimer. It is owing perhaps to the power of art that I can see the tragedies and forbidden pursuits of these German men in a fictional character. Faust, through his restlessness, created this situation himself by agreeing to the bargain. It's that little devil inside all of us that is never fulfilled and always wants more. **L**



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# TEXANA

## Of Concrete and Calm

Built to store water underground, the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern in Houston inspires creativity and reflection.

By Clayton Maxwell

**THE CITY OF HOUSTON**  
built the cistern in 1926.  
It was decommissioned  
in 2007, and public tours  
began in 2016.



**F**rom the first note our tour guide sings across the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern, we know we're in for something special. Here we are, a group of strangers, standing underground within a reservoir about the size of a city block, struck silent by Rosemarie Croll's song, "The Cistern Is." When she's done, her voice floats over the water. The closing tones ring for 17 seconds as the sound echoes between the calm pool and the cistern's 221 concrete columns. No one moves. One woman pulls out tissues.

With its otherworldly acoustics, Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern inspires many such moments of collective effervescence, the sensation of well-being sparked by a powerful shared activity. The underground cavern, an industrial relic located on the edge of downtown Houston, may seem like an unlikely refuge, but our walk down a tunnel from the brightness of Buffalo Bayou Park into this subterranean realm of water and columns is moving.

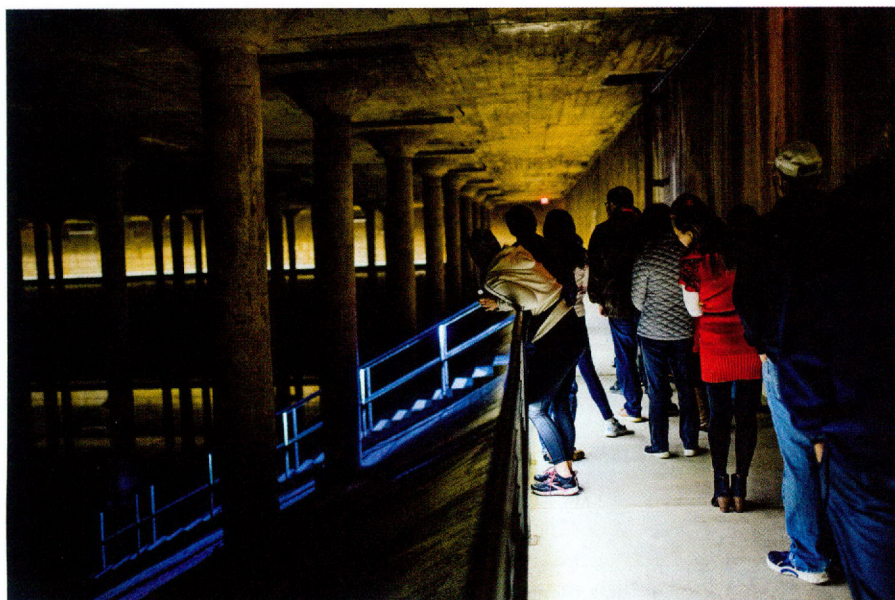
I suspect W.R. Holway, the civil engineer who built this 87,500-square-foot cistern in 1926, could not have imagined the cistern would inspire sacred experiences almost a century after it was created. Or could he?

"It's one of my favorite ponderances," says Croll, who's been the senior cis-

tern attendant since it opened as part of Buffalo Bayou Park in 2016. "Holway made this for the city of Houston to provide water. He never knew that anyone would see it, and yet he still made it beautiful. It's now an architectural monument."

Cisterns were once a common method used to store water with minimal evaporation. Holway's cistern is one of at least two in Houston, though little is known about the other, which is privately owned. The Bayou Park cistern's aesthetics, both visual and auditory, are so striking that it's hard to imagine Holway did not design it with an audience in mind. But in reality, its purpose was utilitarian.

Holway, a Massachusetts native who attended Dartmouth College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, first came out West in 1918 to run a new water filtration plant in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He also designed and oversaw the building of a new water system still used by the city of Tulsa. In 1926, when Holway was 33, the city of Houston hired him as a consulting engineer for the cistern, which would hold 15 million gallons of the city's backup drinking water supply, pumped from artesian wells hundreds of feet below. Over the 95-day construction project, Holway's crew molded 6,000 cubic yards of concrete and 800,000



Photos: Tiffany Hofeldt

# PORT ISABEL TEXAS

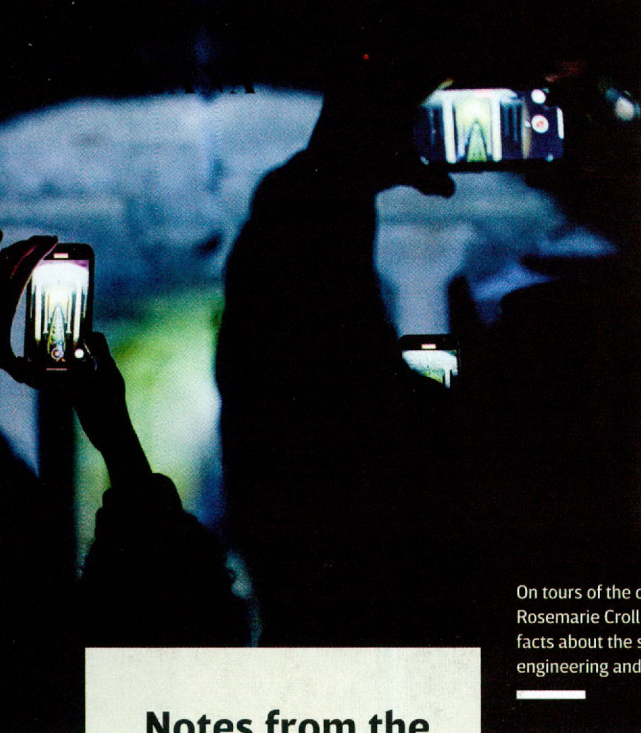


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On tours of the cistern, Rosemarie Croll shares facts about the structure's engineering and history.

## Notes from the Underground

The Buffalo Bayou Partnership schedules a range of activities at the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern. All events are open to participants ages 9 and up:

**History Tours:** Wednesday through Sunday at noon, 30-minute guided tours highlight the cistern's engineering and architecture as well as the history of Houston's water system. \$10; free on the first Thursday of the month.

**Sound Healing Meditation:** Held at 10 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday, these 45-minute sessions offer meditation with the reverberations of crystal singing bowls and wind chimes echoing through the cistern. The sessions are a collaboration with Union is Creation and Youuniversoul. Guests should bring their own cushion or mat. \$15.

**The Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern** is at 105 Sabine St. 713-752-0314, ext. 301; [buffalobayou.org/visit/destination/the-cistern](http://buffalobayou.org/visit/destination/the-cistern)

pounds of reinforced steel into this hidden reservoir, which was needed for Houston's fast-growing population. The cistern held water until it sprung a leak and was decommissioned in 2007.

Croll believes Holway was likely inspired by the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul, Turkey, which was built in the sixth century and is famous for its marble columns adorned with carvings of snaky Medusa heads. Holway's grandson, Bill Hamilton-Holway, a retired Unitarian minister and unofficial family historian, agrees with Croll's theory.

"In his studies at MIT for his degree in civil engineering, W.R. studied all the great water supply systems around the world," says Hamilton-Holway, who lives in California. "My guess is he was intrigued by the Istanbul cistern and saw it as a model for addressing Houston's need."

Hamilton-Holway points to his grandfather's design of the Pensacola Dam on the Grand River in northeastern Oklahoma as another example of how engineering principles can be inherently elegant. "It's renowned for being the longest multiple arch dam in the world at 1.1 miles," he notes. "Multiple arches are an engineering method for distributing the weight of water. They are labor intensive to build, and, as anyone who has stood below the dam knows, they are also beautiful."

Be it a dam or a cistern, Holway was

inspired by ancient engineering principles, which resulted in functional forms that are effortlessly graceful. During tours of this unexpected urban temple, Croll relays fun facts and cool details. She explains the early, loosely monitored days of Houston water sanitation, like in 1903 when the body of a 3-foot eel was found blocking the water pipe of the women's ward at the downtown police station. Croll shows us the cistern's industrial concrete walls and ceiling, shining her flashlight to illuminate the wood grain imprints of the boards used to hold the concrete in place almost 100 years ago.

The cistern's existence today is a resounding triumph in the category of near-misses, for it could have been a parking lot. After it was decommissioned, the cistern was largely forgotten until 2012, when the nonprofit Buffalo Bayou Partnership embarked on a project to upgrade Buffalo Bayou with hike-and-bike trails and lush green parks along the river. While looking for potential parking areas, park designers came across the cistern. To investigate, a few of them climbed through a maintenance hatch—the only entry to the cistern at that time—and descended ladders into pitch blackness. Like treasure hunters, they shined their flashlights upon the defunct water reservoir and were awed by what they found. "Once they saw how beautiful the cistern was, they knew it had to be pre-



served,” Croll says.

After an architectural overhaul that included a new concrete entrance and walkway around the pool’s perimeter, the cistern opened to the public in 2016. Along with multiple weekly history tours, Buffalo Bayou Partnership stages art installations and programming such as the Underground Sounds concert series. A past installation by Berlin, Germany-based multimedia artist Anri Sala included a projected image of a floating turntable over the cistern’s water and a musical soundtrack.

During a September performance by the local octet Two Star Symphony, I was absorbed in the plaintive vibrations of a cello, stand-up bass, and drums. “With that echo, it takes some adjusting,” noted one of the musicians following the performance. “We are looking for that perfect note of resonance with the cistern.”

Karen Farber, the partnership’s vice president of external affairs, says the nonprofit seeks to “amplify the experience of awe” the cistern inspires.

“Every artist who enters the space is interested in activating it with art,” she says. “At the moment, we are most focused on enhancing the inherent qualities of the space—for example, its architecture, acoustics, and reflection—rather than competing with or distracting from them.”

The day after my tour, I return to the cistern for a “sound healing meditation.” Saumil Manek, a cheerful man in flowing white clothes and aviator-style glasses, greets the group before taking a seat to play crystal singing bowls. The music goes deep inside my body, resonating with my cells and organs.

I’d been skeptical about the “healing” capacity of this experience, but now, sitting on a yoga mat in this refuge, I feel the reverberations unspool tension. It’s yet another flash of collective effervescence, a taste of how peak happiness comes through shared moments such as these. And it’s a legacy of aesthetic loveliness, whether intentional or not, left to us by one gifted civil engineer. **L**

# Coming Home

## PAINTINGS BY FORREST BESS



*Exhibition Dates:*

April 21, 2023 - June 24, 2023

*Hours:*

Tuesday - Friday 12:30pm to 5:30pm  
Saturday 10am to 2pm



For More Info On This Exhibition:



361-972-1148



[museumpalacios2@gmail.com](mailto:museumpalacios2@gmail.com)

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



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## Azalea & Spring Flower Trail

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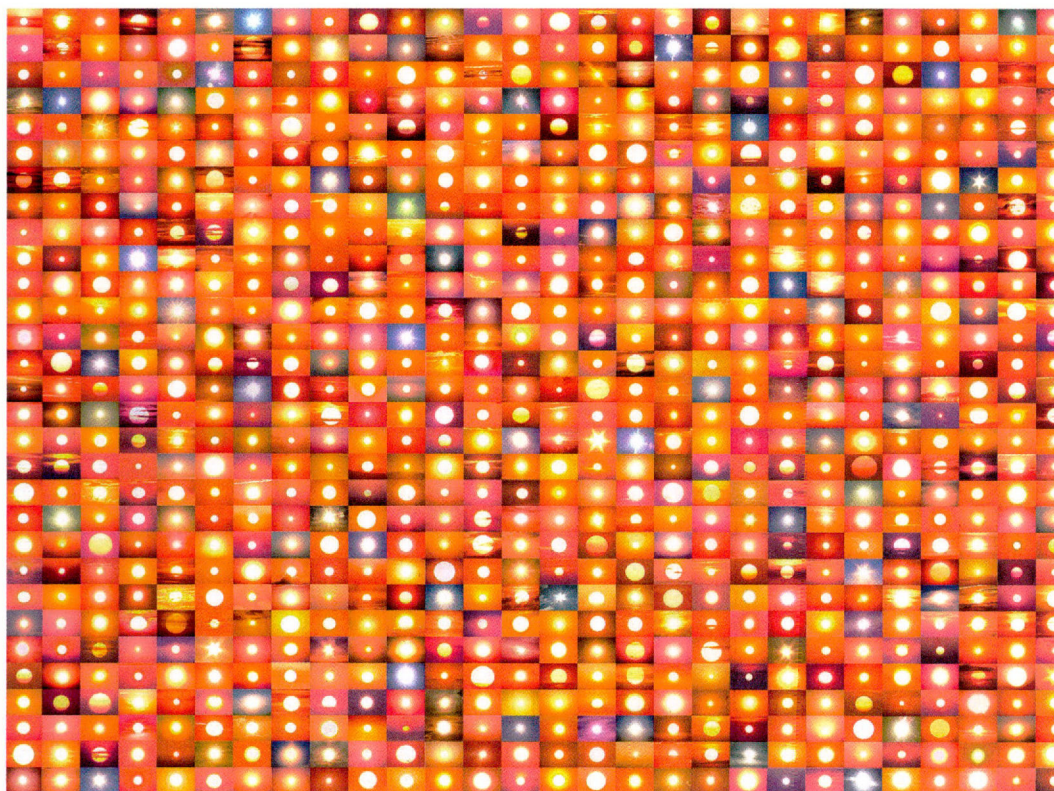


[TylerAzaleaTrail.com](http://TylerAzaleaTrail.com)





# EVENTS



## Screen Play

A new exhibit at Fort Worth's Modern Art Museum explores screen time and culture

In 1969, the Apollo moon landing became one of the most-watched moments in television history, with around 650 million people tuning in to see Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walk across the lunar surface. The same year, ARPANET, the first internet prototype, came to fruition. These two events were watershed moments that connected people through screens, and they serve as the introduction into a new exhibit at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

*I'll Be Your Mirror: Art and the Digital Screen*, running Feb. 12–April 30, examines screens' impact on art from 1969 to the present. The exhibit showcases work from 50 artists throughout the past 50 years and includes paintings, video games, augmented reality, video, sculpture, and digital art.

The show also examines screens as a major part of how we connect and form meaning in life and culture. There are nine themes: liminal space, connectivity, surveillance, the repository, digital abstraction, the posthuman body, ecology, turning a mirror on ourselves, and automation and the loneliness epidemic. Curator Alison Hearst says one exciting piece in the exhibit is by Andy Warhol. "In 1985, the artist did a series of Amiga [a personal computer model from the 1980s and '90s] computer drawings that were saved on floppy discs and assumed to be lost forever," Hearst says. "But they were saved, so we're showcasing these drawings on an actual Amiga computer."

The exhibit covers 25,000 square feet and is the first of its kind in the Southwest. —Amanda Ogle

*I'll Be Your Mirror: Art and the Digital Screen, Feb. 12–April 30*  
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,  
3200 Darnell St.  
themodern.org

### GULF COAST

#### BEAUMONT

**Mardi Gras Southeast Texas**  
Feb. 16–19

Enjoy four days of parades, concerts, kids' activities, arts and crafts, and food vendors. *Great Lawn of the Event Center, 700 Crockett St. 409-721-8717; mardigrastx.com*

#### CLUTE

**Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express**

Feb. 10–12, 17–19

Witness beloved detective Hercule Poirot as he battles the clock to figure out "whodunit" in this classic murder mystery. *Center for the Arts and Sciences, 400 College Blvd. 979-265-7661; brazosportcenter.org*

#### CORPUS CHRISTI

**Winter Lecture Series**

Through Feb. 22

Learn about South Texas horticulture and the environment from experts while meeting other enthusiasts over a cup of coffee. *South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, 8545 S. Staples St. 361-852-2100; stxbot.org*

#### CORPUS CHRISTI

**An Interplanetary Experience Concert**

Feb. 4

This suite by British composer Gustav Holst is enhanced by a multimedia presentation, which includes photos and images from planets of our solar system shown on the massive screen at the Performing Arts Center. In addition, the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra celebrates Black History Month with the music of one America's greatest jazz composers, Duke Ellington. *Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi Performing Arts Center, 6300 Ocean Drive, Suite 5723. 361-883-6683; ccssymphony.org*

#### FREEPORT

**Mardis Gras Festival**

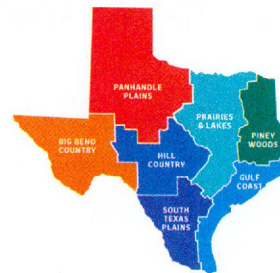
Feb. 18

Festivities for Mardi Gras include a parade, a gumbo cookoff, a king cake-eating contest, and live



## FREE EVENTS GUIDE

Want even more events delivered to your mailbox? Get a free subscription to the quarterly *Texas Highways* Events Calendar at [texashighways.com/eventssubscription](https://www.texashighways.com/eventssubscription)



entertainment. *Freeport Historical Museum*, 311 E. Park Ave. 979-233-0066; [freeport.tx.us](https://www.freeport.tx.us)

### **GALVESTON**

#### **Mardi Gras! Galveston**

Feb. 10-21

The third-largest Mardi Gras celebration in the country includes masked balls, balcony parties, parades, concerts, and lots of beads. *Historic Downtown and Seawall*. [mardigrasgalveston.com](https://www.mardigrasgalveston.com)

### **HOUSTON**

#### **Chicago**

Through Feb. 12

The musical has received six Tony Awards, two Olivier Awards, a Grammy, and thousands of standing ovations. *Hobby Center for the Performing Arts*, 800 Bagby St. 713-558-8887; [tuts.com](https://www.tuts.com)

### **HOUSTON**

#### **Robert Motherwell Drawing: As Fast as the Mind Itself**

Through March 12

This is the most comprehensive survey ever mounted of the drawings of Robert Motherwell, spanning the artist's career from the 1940s through the '80s with more than 100 works. *Menil Drawing Institute*, 1412 W. Main St. 713-525-9400; [menil.org](https://www.menil.org)

### **HOUSTON**

#### **The Life and Times of Charles Goodnight**

Through March 31

Oil paintings by artist Lee Cable detail the life 1800s cowboy and plainsman Charles Goodnight. Phase 1 of the exhibit showcases six sketches, a touch cart, and paintings including *Finding Cynthia Ann Parker*, *Old Blue*, *Giving Counsel*, *A Promise Made, A Promise Kept*, *Quannah Parker*, and *A Good Idea Gone Bad*. Phase 2 of the exhibit adds six paintings to the collection to celebrate the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo 2023 season. *The Albert and Ethel Herstein Museum Gallery*, 1100 Bagby St. 713-655-1912; [heritagesociety.org](https://www.heritagesociety.org)

### **HOUSTON**

#### **Walter De Maria:**

#### **Boxes for Meaningless Work**

Through April 23

The Menil Collection presents the

first museum exhibition to survey the artist's career spanning more than 50 years. *The Menil Collection*, 1533 Sul Ross St. 713-525-9400; [menil.org](https://www.menil.org)

### **HOUSTON**

#### **Steve Tobin Intertwined:**

#### **Exploring Nature's Networks**

Through Aug. 13

American artist Steve Tobin, who is known for his works in glass, bronze, ceramic, and steel, including *Trinity Root*, a memorial cast from a tree that protected a New York City cathedral on 9/11. The exhibition features pieces from several series, including *Clouds*, *Nests*, *Bronze Roots*, and *Steelroots*, all of which capture the unseen power of the natural world while celebrating the importance of the systems that give life to the Garden. *Houston Botanic Garden*, 1 Botanic Lane. 713-715-9675; [hbg.org](https://www.hbg.org)

### **HOUSTON**

#### **Art of the Cameroon Grassfields, a Living Heritage in Houston**

Feb. 17-July 9

This exhibition, celebrating the artistic traditions of Cameroon and its global diaspora, features headaddresses, masks, prestige hats, royal stools and figural sculptures, palace architectural elements from the Grassfields kingdoms, and two recent works by Douala-based artist Hervé Youmbi. *The Menil Collection*, 1533 Sul Ross St. 713-525-9400; [menil.org](https://www.menil.org)

### **LAKE JACKSON**

#### **Bird Banding**

Feb. 18

Watch volunteers collect baseline data on bird populations at the sanctuary. The banding station is an opportunity to see birds up close and to learn about the birds of the Brazosport area. *Gulf Coast Bird Observatory*, 299 SH 332 West. 979-480-0999; [gcbco.org](https://www.gcbco.org)

### **PALACIOS**

#### **African American Heritage Day**

Feb. 18

Local speakers present contributions made in the past and present by the African American community of Palacios. Tours may be provided upon request.

*City by the Sea Museum*,

401 Commerce St. 310-650-9352; [palacioschamber.com](https://www.palacioschamber.com)

### **PASADENA**

#### **Greater Houston Train Show**

Feb. 18

See operating layouts, take classes on railroads and modeling subjects, participate in National Model Railroad Association contests, and shops from an array of vendors from across the Southwest. *Pasadena Convention Center*, 7902 Fairmont Parkway. 713-899-5127; [sanjacmodeltrains.org](https://www.sanjacmodeltrains.org)

### **PORT ARANSAS**

#### **Port Aransas Art Center**

#### **First Friday**

Feb. 3

The exhibition of local artworks also includes refreshments and live music. *Port Aransas Art Center*, 104 N. Alister St. 361-749-7334; [portaransasartcenter.org](https://www.portaransasartcenter.org)

### **PORT ARANSAS**

#### **Whooping Crane Festival**

Feb. 23-26

Each year since 1996, the festival celebrates the return of the cranes to their wintering habitat at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The event features speakers, birding trips, boating trips, nature tours, photography workshops, and a trade show. *Various locations*. 361-749-5919; [portaransas.org/whooping-crane-festival](https://www.portaransas.org/whooping-crane-festival)

### **ROCKPORT**

#### **Bountiful Bowl Pottery Fair**

Feb. 5-6

Potters from around the world display their works for sale. There's a fair, a reception, and an art loop of galleries. *Rockport Center for the Arts*, 106 S. Austin St. 361-729-5352; [bountifulbowl.org](https://www.bountifulbowl.org)

### **ROCKPORT**

#### **Lamardi Gras**

Feb. 10-11

This festival features food, a parade, and other festivities on Lamar Peninsula to benefit the Lamar Volunteer Fire Department. *Lamar Volunteer Fire Department*, 302 Bois D'Arc St. 361-205-7037; [lamarvfd.com](https://www.lamarvfd.com)

### **SOUTH PADRE ISLAND**

#### **SPI Kite Fest**

Feb. 2-4

Professional flyers showcase their skills in both outdoor and indoor performances. Concessions are available. *South Padre Island Convention Center*, 7355 Padre Blvd. 956-761-3000; [sopadre.com/event/spi-kite-fest-2023/869](https://www.sopadre.com/event/spi-kite-fest-2023/869)

### **SOUTH PADRE ISLAND**

#### **Surfin' Sunday Lessons**

Feb. 21-Sept. 30

Every Sunday in front of the DJ Lerma Pavilion, patrons can learn to surf for free. *DJ Lerma Pavilion*, *Isla Blanca Park*, 33174 State Park Road 100. 808-781-7456; [surfvive.org](https://www.surfvive.org)

### **SURFSIDE BEACH**

#### **Marathon**

Feb. 18

The event includes a marathon, half-marathon, 5K, and kids' 1K. At the post-race party, runners can enjoy Texas barbecue, drinks, and games. Races start as the sun rises over the water. Follow the public beach to San Luis Pass, then return. The course is on firm, smooth sand. *Stahlman Park*, 2211 Bluewater Highway. [surfsidebeachmarathon.com](https://www.surfsidebeachmarathon.com)

### **VICTORIA**

#### **Always ... Patsy Cline**

Feb. 10-19

Theatre Victoria presents this true story of an unlikely friendship between Patsy Cline and a fan from Houston who befriended her in a Texas honky-tonk. The show features classic Cline hits. *Leo J. Welder Center for the Performing Arts*, 214 N. Main St. 361-576-6277; [theatrevictoria.org](https://www.theatrevictoria.org)

### **VICTORIA**

#### **Beethoven's Fifth**

Feb. 25

Hear this ubiquitous masterpiece along with a musical parody of the equally famous *Barber of Seville* with a twist. Croatian guitarist Ana Vidovic plays Rodrigo's famous *Fantasia* for guitar and orchestra. *Victoria Fine Arts Center*, 1002 Sam Houston Drive. 361-576-4500; [victoriasymphony.com](https://www.victoriasymphony.com)



## HILL COUNTRY

## AUSTIN

## PrintAustin

Through Feb. 15

During this annual festival organized by PrintAustin Collective, patrons can partake in printmaking-focused experiences, exhibitions at museums and galleries, and virtual programming. *Various locations. 512-900-8952; printaustin.org*

## AUSTIN

## Medieval X Modern

Through July 9

The exhibition presents medieval objects and the works of modern artists from Europe and the Americas who created prints, drawings, paintings, illustrated books, sculptures, and decorative objects informed by the craftsmanship and historical figures of the Middle Ages. *Blanton Museum of Art, 200 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 512-471-5482; blantonmuseum.org*

## AUSTIN

## Carnaval Brasileiro

Feb. 4

One of the biggest carnival celebrations outside Brazil, Carnaval Brasileiro brings samba, costumes, and more to Austin. *The Concourse Project, 8509 Bursleson Road. sambaparty.com*

## AUSTIN

## OUTsider Festival

Feb. 15-19

OUTsider brings together Austin's LGBTQ community for a multi-disciplinary art festival showcasing film, performance art, music, and visual arts. *The Vortex, 2307 Manor Road, Suite 2135. outsidersfest.org*

## BANDERA

## 11th Street Mardi Gras and Main Street Parade

Feb. 10-12

This three-day Mardi Gras celebration features Cajun food and zydeco music. Colorful floats and other parade entries travel down Bandera's Main Street in the Mardi Gras Parade on Feb. 11. *11th Street Cowboy Bar, 307 11th St. 830-796-4849; 11thstreetcowboybar.com*

## BOERNE

## Chocolate Walk

Feb. 10-11

Participants stroll through historic downtown to collect a chocolate treat from each participating store, gallery, and restaurant along Main Street. Once you've visited all the stores, return your raffle ticket for

a chance to win prizes. *Historic Downtown Boerne, 100 N. Main St. 830-249-9511; ci.boerne.tx.us/602/boerne-chocolate-walk*

## BOERNE

## Spring Antique Show

Feb. 25-26

This antiques show features exhibitor booths overflowing with American antiques from estates around the country. Collectors bring real antiques—no reproductions or imports—that include country furniture, baskets, stoneware, glassware, jewelry, textiles, early paper, toys, silver, quilts, pewter, American Oak, and Southwestern items. *Kendall County Fair Grounds, 1307 River Road. 830-329-2870; texasantiqueshow.com/boerne-antique-shows.htm*

## BURNET

## Highland Lakes Quilt Festival and Show

Feb. 3-4

More than 100 quilts are on display, and guests can purchase handmade gifts and novelties; place bids on silent auction items; shop the vendor booths; and purchase tickets for a chance to win the fundraising quilt, "Hill Country Jewels." *Burnet Community Center, 401 E. Jackson St. hlaq.org*

## KERRVILLE

## The Highwaymen Live: a Musical Tribute

Feb. 25

Super group The Highwaymen—which featured Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Johnny Cash—traveled the world performing country music to millions of fans. This show features portrayals of those stars. *Cailloux Theater, 910 Main St. 830-896-9393; caillouxperformingarts.com*

## LUCKENBACH

## Hug-In and Valentine Ball

Feb. 10-11

Get "Back to the Basics of Love" with live music and dancing at the 48th annual ball. *Luckenbach Texas, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. luckenbachtexas.com*

## NEW BRAUNFELS

## Love the Run You're With

Feb. 11

The 5K is presented by Comal ISD's Comal Fit. *Gruene Historic District, near Gruene Hall, 1281 Gruene Road. 830-629-5077; comalisd.org/apps/pages/comal\_fit*

## NEW BRAUNFELS

## Game Day 5K and Tailgate Party

Feb. 12

Wear your favorite team's jersey and earn a football trophy in your age group. After the race, enjoy music, food, and a tailgate party. A kids' 1K has been added this year. Later, head to Mozle's to watch the Super Bowl. *Rockin' R River Rides, 1405 Gruene Road. 830-629-9999; athleteguild.com*

## SAN MARCOS

## Half Marathon

Feb. 5

The course is an endurance test with a mixture of challenging hills and flat stretches. It's the oldest half-marathon course in Texas. *Tanger Outlets, 4015 I-35 210-849-8275; scallywompus.com*

## SAN MARCOS

## Mardi Gras Parade

Feb. 18

The parade winds through the Historic Homes District of San Marcos and downtown. *San Marcos Downtown and Historic District, 222 W. San Antonio St. 318-787-3419; visitsanmarcos.com/event/mistick-krewe-of-oceanos-carnival-parade/3055*

## PANHANDLE PLAINS

## SAN ANGELO

## Buffalo Soldier Heritage Day

Feb. 26

Celebrate the contributions of the buffalo soldiers to West Texas and the military frontier with displays, living history, and special talks. Buffalo soldiers were Black soldiers who mainly served on the Western frontier after the Civil War. Their duties included building roads and infrastructure, and guarding the U.S. mail. *Fort Concho National Historic Landmark, 630 S. Oakes St. 325-481-2646; fortconcho.com*

## PINEY WOODS

## HENDERSON

## Mardi Gras Celebration

Feb. 25

The celebration features live music from the Swampland Revival zydeco band, an old-fashioned cake walk, Cajun food, and plenty of beads. *Henderson Civic Center, 1500 Lake Forest Parkway. 903-392-0691; visithendersontx.com*

## HUNTSVILLE

## Experience a Day in the Life of a CCC Enrollee

Feb. 18

Take an interactive tour through the life of Civilian Conservation Corps recruits. Read about the corps' formation, try out their tools and uniforms, visit the camp store to shop the benefits of being an enrollee, and hear from members of the corps themselves, through their newsletter. Visit Ravens Lodge and look out at Lake Raven, which they helped create. *Huntsville State Park, 565 Park Road 40 West. 936-295-5644; tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/huntsville*

## HUNTSVILLE

## Prison City Film Festival

Feb. 22-25

The four-day independent film festival showcases independent films and filmmakers. *Old Town Theatre, 1023 12th St. 936-293-8681; prisoncityfilmfestival.com*

## JEFFERSON

## Mardi Gras

Feb. 17-19

Festivities include parades, live music, food, vendors, a carnival, frosty beverages, masks, and beads. *Downtown Jefferson. mardigrasupriver.com*

## LONGVIEW

## Towards a 21st Century Abstraction

Through Feb. 11

Curated by Los Angeles art critic Peter Frank, this exhibition presents seven painters from across the country pushing the boundaries of abstraction. *Longview Museum of Fine Arts, 215 E. Tyler St. 903-753-8103; lmfa.org*

## PRAIRIES AND LAKES

## BELLVILLE

## Chocolate Walk

Feb. 9

Walk the downtown square and explore the shops of Bellville and other local merchants while trying a variety of chocolate confections at each stop. Redeem a punched card at the end of the evening for a chance to win prizes. *The Shops of Downtown, 1 E. Main St. 979-865-3407; discoverbellville.com*

## BRENHAM

## The Mousetrap

Feb. 9-26

After hearing a woman has been murdered, the guests and staff at



Monkswell Manor find themselves stranded during a snowstorm. As it becomes clear the killer is among them, the seven strangers grow increasingly suspicious of one another. *Unity Theatre, 300 Church St. 979-830-8358; unitybrenham.org*

#### COLLEGE STATION

##### **Mandela: The Official Exhibition** Through April 30

The story of Nelson Mandela is told in a series of displays that cover his rural childhood home, years of struggle against the apartheid regime, and his eventual vindication and final years as South Africa's first democratically elected president. *George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, 1000 George Bush Drive West. 979-691-4010; bush41.org*

#### DALLAS

##### **Don't Let the Pigeon** **Drive the Bus: The Musical** Through Feb. 19

This musical based on the book by Mo Willems features a pigeon who never gets to do anything. Everything changes when the Bus Driver rolls into town, and the Pigeon finds himself with a brand new goal: driving the bus. *Rosewood Center, 5938 Skillman St. 214-978-0110; dct.org*

#### DALLAS

##### **1619 Project** Feb. 9-26

In late August 1619, a ship arrived in the British colony of Virginia with a cargo of 20-30 enslaved people from Africa. Their arrival led to the barbaric and unprecedented system of American chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years. This one-act show features eight commissions by local and national playwrights who weave together stories that explore the legacy of slavery in present-day America. *Bishop Arts Theatre Center, 215 S. Tyler St. 214-948-0716; bishopartstheatre.org/theatre-series*

#### DALLAS

##### **Endlings** Feb. 10-19

This is the final production of Cry Havoc Theater Company, a teen group celebrated for putting young artists in the lead as creators and actors. *Endlings* is a play that tackles climate change, social justice, grief, the pandemic, and art with frank, youthful honesty. Post-show conversations with subject matter resources follow every performance. *Rosewood Center, 5938 Skillman St. 214-978-0110; dct.org*

#### DALLAS

##### **In the Shadow of Dictatorship:** **Creating the Museum** **of Spanish Abstract Art** Feb. 26-June 18

During an era when Spanish artists found success abroad yet struggled for recognition at home, artist, critic, and collector Fernando Zbel established the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español in Cuenca, Spain, on July 1, 1966. Highlights from its collection, most coming to the U.S. for the first time, tell the story of the pioneering museum and explore abstract Spanish art from the mid-20th century and under the Francoist regime. *Meadows Museum, 5900 Bishop Blvd. 214-768-2516; meadowsmuseumdallas.org/exhibitions/spanish-abstract-art*

#### IRVING

##### **The Artistry of Jazz with Violinist** **Scott Tixier** Feb. 11

In the first concert of the New Year for the Irving Symphony Orchestra, the composer-in-residence program highlights a new orchestral piece by a young composer. World-renowned jazz violinist and University of North Texas faculty professor Scott Tixier offers his compositions for jazz violin and orchestra. The concert concludes with Symphony No. 1 by German composer Johannes Brahms. *Irving Arts Center-Carpenter Performance Hall, 3333 N. MacArthur Blvd. 972-831-8818; irvingsymphony.org*

#### MCKINNEY

##### **Dinosaurs Live!** Through Feb. 20

Encounter the 46-foot tall T-rex and 10 new life-size animatronic dinosaurs along the nature trails at the 16th annual exhibit. See the dinosaurs move and hear them roar. An outdoor fossil dig is available for kids. *Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary, 1 Nature Place. 972-562-5566; heardmuseum.org/dinosaurs-live*

#### MCKINNEY

##### **Krewe of Barkus Dog Parade** Feb. 19

Dogs and their owners dress up in costumes and parade around McKinney's downtown square. Prizes are awarded in multiple categories. Music, food trucks, and pet-related vendors add to the festivities. *Mitchell Park, 300 W. Louisiana St. 972-547-2660; artsinstituteofmckinney.com*

#### MCKINNEY

##### **MillHouse Winter ArtFest** Feb. 25-26

Explore art by local artisans showcased against century-old architecture. Featured artists offer acrylic, oil, watercolor, pottery, and jewelry. Food and drinks are available from local food trucks. *McKinney Cotton Mill, 610 Elm St. 202-810-2101; millhousefoundation.org/artfest*

#### NOCONA

##### **Mardi Gras Nocona Style** Feb. 11-18

Enjoy parades, Cajun food, live music, and classic cars at this family- and pet-friendly event. *Downtown Nocona, 100 Clay St. 940-825-3526; nocona.org/events*

#### PLANO

##### **The Official Supernatural** **Convention** Feb. 3-5

This fan convention celebrates the TV show *Supernatural*. The event features stars Jared Padalecki, Jensen Ackles, and Misha Collins, who participate in onstage panels, photo ops, autograph signings as well as special events throughout the weekend. *Plano Event Center, 2000 E. Spring Creek Parkway. visitplano.com/event/the-official-supernatural-convention-2*

#### POWDERLY

##### **Hard Labor Mountain Bike Race** Feb. 4-5

The Texas Mountain Bike Racing Association hosts the Texas State Championship Series and the first mountain bike racing event of the spring series. There are races for all ages and abilities, and first-time racers can take a clinic on Saturday. The Kids Cup race on Saturday is for ages 12 and under. *Sanders Cove at Pat Mayse Lake. 903-785-8055; tmbra.org/wp*

#### TEMPLE

##### **Quanah Parker:** **One Man Two Worlds** Through April 15

In 1836, a Comanche raiding party took Cynthia Ann Parker from her family. She married a Comanche chief and mothered children including Quanah Parker, the last Comanche chief. Quanah became one of the most important Comanche leaders in both war and peace. This photo exhibit tells this story of their lives caught between two different worlds. *Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum, 315 W. Avenue B. 254-298-5172; templeparks.com*

#### WASHINGTON

##### **Texas Independence Day** **Celebration** Feb. 26-27

Celebrate 187 years of Texas independence at the place where Texas became Texas. The 1830s come to life with historic interpreters, craftsmen, music, and artillery firing. *Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, 23400 Park Road 12. 936-878-2214; wheretexasbecametexas.org*

#### SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

#### BEEVILLE

##### **El Corazon, Scenes and Memories** **from Mexico** Through April 15

A collection of paintings and cut paper pieces from Guadalupe Hernandez explores the Mexican diaspora through the lens of people, places, and memories from his childhood in Mexico. *Beeville Art Museum, 401 E. Fannin St. 361-358-8615; bamtxas.org*

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **Something Wicked:** **Susan Hilferty Costumes** Through March 26

Hilferty won the Tony Award for Best Costume Design of a Musical in 2004 for her work on *Wicked*. This exhibition presents 30 of her avant-garde costumes and explores the process of design. View artworks from the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts and paintings by Judith Godwin, Robin Utterback, and Grace Hartigan. *The McNay, Tobin Theatre Arts and Brown Galleries, 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave. 210-824-5368; mcnayart.org*

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **Tangible/Nothing** Through April 30

The exhibition features 40 works by artists with Texas roots, such as Rick Lowe, Dario Robledo, Alejandro Diaz, Adam Schreiber, Katie Pell, and Chuck Ramirez, as well other national and international artists. Many works represent apparent voids, vestiges of what's missing, or subjects not pictured. Admission is free. *Ruby City, 150 Camp St. 210-227-8400; rubycity.org*

#### SAN ANTONIO

##### **The Hero Twins: Blood Race** Feb. 4-March 5

An invented mythology inspired by classic Mayan narratives, this show is an allegory about inequality, justice, and liberation. *Magik Theatre, 420 S. Alamo St. 210-227-2751; magiktheatre.org/the-hero-twins*

### DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT?

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





Beaumont draws visitors from near and far to fish, hunt, bird, paddle, and—yes—even hold live alligators. On the border of Louisiana, bringing the Cajun flair, but still as Texan as Texas can be, you'll find comfortable and friendly accommodations with plenty to do and see. In addition to our amazing biodiversity and nature hot spots, Beaumont is also a hub of oil boom history — with museums and landmarks dedicated to telling our unique story. When visiting, you should expect the unexpected because, as we say, *all times lead to good times* in Beaumont!



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## THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5



# Gruene

*The color of Texas*

BY CHET GARNER

Tucked along the winding Guadalupe River in the Hill Country is a town that's much bigger in legend than in size. The entire Gruene Historic District located within New Braunfels is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Though it extends only about 25 acres, it's filled with more history, food, and lore than cities 100 times its size. Making a pilgrimage here is a rite of passage for any Texan—just don't pronounce it "Groo-in."

### Downtown Gruene

Drive down Gruene's main street, Hunter Road, and you'll feel like you've stepped into an idyllic small town painting with mom and pop businesses filling every storefront. Stock up on knickknacks and grab a hand-dipped ice cream cone from the Gruene General Store. Personalize your new cowboy hat at Gruene Hat Company—they'll even set it on fire to give it char marks. Decorate your yard with oddities and tin décor from Gruene Gardens. At the end of the day, park yourself at an outdoor fire pit with a glass of Texas wine from The Grapevine.

### Wurst in Gruene

The wurst is the best at this food trailer parked at the edge of the Gruene Grove beer and margarita garden. The tasty bratwurst comes nestled inside a warm pretzel bun, slathered with your choice of toppings like sautéed onions and fried jalapeños. Add their house-made sauerkraut to anything on the menu for a tangy kick.

### Guadalupe River

Most folks visit this beautiful river in the summer months when it's packed with swimmers, tubers, and sunbathers. But visit in the winter and you'll find a much calmer river and an ample supply of trout. After stocking up on supplies and fishing tips at Gruene Outfitters, head to the water and attempt to catch a rainbow trout. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department stocks thousands of the cold-water fish in the river each winter. You'll definitely catch a great time.

### Gristmill River Restaurant and Bar

There may be no restaurant in Texas that serves a better chicken-fried steak. The building itself is a mix of metal, brick, and wood that was once the town's cotton gin. In 1977 it was saved from near collapse and repurposed into a destination eatery packed with hundreds of patrons each weekend. Every meal should start with the house onion rings followed by Texas classics including burgers, pork ribs, and steaks. Save room for the whiskey pecan pie.

### Gruene Hall

No day in Gruene is complete without stepping onto the wooden floor of the oldest dance hall in Texas, dating to 1878. Like most German towns, Gruene was anchored by a community hall used for dancing, voting, reunions, and even badger fights. In the 1970s, two young entrepreneurs turned it into one of Texas' best dance halls. A young George Strait played here regularly when he was getting started, and country stars from Garth Brooks to Kacey Musgraves have performed on its stage. Your feet will naturally start two stepping no matter if you hear a famous band at a ticketed event or listen to a local troubadour on a weekday night.

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





# Kitchen Capable

Dedication and skill have taken Tiffany Derry from IHOP cook to entrepreneur and TV personality

By June Naylor

**T**o watch Tiffany Derry on high-intensity TV cooking competitions is to witness grace under pressure. On cable shows like *Top Chef* and *Bobby's Triple Threat*, the Dallas-based chef makes it look easy—working at lightning speed, nailing each minute element of a nuanced dish, never breaking a sweat. How does someone learn to do that? Derry credits IHOP.

The Beaumont native has built a stellar resume in the roughly two decades since she learned the ropes in the kitchen of the ubiquitous pancake chain. In the past couple of years, she opened her signature restaurant, Roots Southern Table, in Farmers Branch; expanded her Plano-based Roots Chicken Shak to Austin; traveled to Hawaii to cook for Oprah Winfrey; launched the 'Shef Tiffany Creole Seasoning spice blend; served as a food ambassador on a U.S. Embassy trip; and got engaged to her longtime sweetheart, William Johnson.

**“As a short-order cook at IHOP, I was the fastest you could find. I took that foundation and applied it everywhere I worked.”**



Derry has twice been a finalist for a James Beard Award, among the highest honors in the culinary world. Last year, she was recognized in the “Best Chef: Texas” category, and Roots Southern Table made the national finals for “Best New Restaurant.”

With Roots Southern Table, Derry and her business partner, Tom Foley, explore soulful Southern cuisine through a modern lens. The dishes lean a little toward fancy just in time to sway back toward comfort. Though the menu changes frequently, recent offerings have included dishes like Texas peaches and prosciutto topped with micro-herbs and tempura-fried zucchini blossoms with house-made ranch dressing.

Chatting about her journey on a Friday at her restaurant, Derry pauses only to phone her mom in Beaumont to help recall family food memories. Then it's showtime. She grabs her chef coat, rallies her staff, and she's off to the kitchen races.



**TH:** *When did you start cooking?*

**TD:** I was 15, wanted a job, and went to IHOP. About the same time, I started in our high school's [Ozen High in Beaumont] culinary career training center. We did catering and cookoffs, and I learned this was my field. The experience from IHOP was huge. I worked the graveyard shift after high school and all the way through culinary school, too. As a short-order cook, I was the fastest you could find. I took that foundation and applied it everywhere I worked.

**TH:** *Did culinary school provide the segue into upscale cuisine?*

**TD:** I got my culinary degree from The Art Institute in Houston, where I interned at the restaurant Pesce with chef Mark Holley. Then he offered me a permanent job. I was hesitant to leave IHOP because I was making good money by that time, and I had bills. But Mark matched the pay, and I was in fine dining.

**TH:** *What was the Houston food scene like, and how did Dallas become home?*

**TD:** Houston's food community was chefs hanging out together all the time—it's one big family. But a job with Landry's gave me the chance to open restaurants for them, and one was in Dallas.

**TH:** *How do you blend TV gigs into your work life?*

**TD:** In 2010, I was on season seven of *Top Chef*. Then I was a finalist again for *Top Chef: All-Stars* the next year. Private Social [the Dallas restaurant where Derry worked at the time] closed in 2013, and I started doing more TV, like *Bar Rescue* and *Cutthroat Kitchen*, traveling between New York and LA. But Dallas remained home. In the past year, there's been Guy Fieri's *Tournament of Champions III*, the PBS show *Great American Recipe*—we had to taste over 20 plates a day—and *Bobby's Triple Threat* [with Bobby Flay]. It's a lot of travel, but it's so much fun.

**TH:** *What are some of your interesting travel adventures beyond TV?*

**TD:** I've served as an American cooking

ambassador for the U.S. Embassy for groups in Mumbai, Paris, and most recently, Albania. It's fun and rushed because the days are long, and we often go from city to city in a country. But it's cool because I always learn something. Also, I got to go to Hawaii a couple of times with a team to cook for Oprah.

**TH:** *How did you get back into restaurant work again?*

**TD:** Tom Foley and I teamed up to launch Roots Chicken Shak in Legacy Hall in Plano, which was a stepping-stone to Roots Southern Table—a concept I planned for seven years. The goal was to do traditional Southern dishes with cheffy influences, and we finally landed in just the right spot. Farmers Branch really supports us.

**TH:** *You're committed to supporting the community. How does this take shape?*

**TD:** I've been involved with the national program called No Kid Hungry for a good while. I've also been part of the James Beard Foundation's Chef Bootcamp for Policy and Change, a program that lobbies to get nutrition into public schools and protect SNAP recipients. I recently hosted a big dinner to benefit The Defensive Line, which aims to end the youth suicide epidemic, especially among people of color. With Roots Chicken Shak, we make business ownership possible for people who haven't had the opportunity. It's a way we hope to help close gender, racial, and wealth gaps.

**TH:** *How did you develop the dishes for Roots Southern Table?*

**TD:** I wanted to educate my sous chefs, so we went to Beaumont to eat my mom's gumbo and cornbread and pound cake. In Louisiana, we stopped for boudin at gas stations, ate oysters on Lake Pontchartrain. In New Orleans, we went everywhere so they could see where food can go. We took notes, and every night we reviewed everything we'd eaten.

**TH:** *When you're traveling in Texas, where do you go to eat?*

**TD:** I'm in Austin a lot with our newer Chicken Shak there, and I love the food around town, like what they're doing at Canje with all the Caribbean influences. And the barbecue, like at Black's—you can't beat that.

**TH:** *But you're still attached to your family's cooking back home?*

**TD:** Everything we do in our family is centered around food. My mom is one of 11 kids, and I have more than 50 first cousins in Beaumont and Houston. Someone is always cooking. At the holidays, I just show up. One uncle is in charge of beef roast. Another does candied yams and caramel cake. My mom does dirty rice and rice dressing. There's turkey, ham, and duck, too.

**TH:** *Is your popular chicken and potatoes in duck fat dish a family recipe?*

**TD:** It's funny, I was giving credit to France because I first ate duck fat fries there at age 18. But when I was about 30, I thought, *What am I talking about? I've been eating duck my whole life!* My grandmother takes a whole duck and bakes it on top of a bed of her cornbread dressing, and the fat just drips down with so much flavor. I did my own version a couple of years ago, and my mom said, "It's good but it's not quite the same." It didn't have my grandmother's touch. 🐼

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Tiffany Derry's restaurants include Roots Southern Table in Farmers Branch and Roots Chicken Shak in Plano and Austin. Watch her TV appearances this spring on PBS' *The Great American Recipe* and later in 2023 on Food Network's *Tournament of Champions III*.  
[tiffanyderryconcepts.com](http://tiffanyderryconcepts.com)

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# VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



## Down at the Springs

AUSTIN, CIRCA 1935

**I**n 1837, settler William “Uncle Billy” Barton moved his family to a remote Hill Country creek near its confluence with the Colorado River. Barton recognized the cluster of springs that fed the creek as a reliable water source to raise livestock and crops. But he may not have known humans had visited the springs for at least 10,000 years, including Tonkawas and Comanches who inhabited the region at the time Barton arrived. As the city of Austin took shape on the Colorado’s opposite bank, Barton Springs—fed by up to 80 million gallons a day from the Edwards Aquifer—powered mills, provided water for ice-making, and became a popular place to swim. In 1917, then-owner Andrew Zilker deeded the springs to the city, leading to the construction of a concrete dam and sidewalks to create the pool as it appears in this photo. A young Robert Redford learned to swim in the pool while visiting family in the 1940s. Today, nearly 1 million people visit Barton Springs each year to plunge into its 68-degree rejuvenating waters. **L**

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



DESTINATION

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