

MORE READERS' *Top 40* DESTINATIONS!

TEXASTM HIGHWAYS

AUGUST 2014



The TRAVEL MAGAZINE of TEXAS

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TYLER'S FAMOUS
BARBECUE**

**AUSTIN'S
GARDEN OF YES**

**GET YOUR KICKS
ROCKETBUSTER BOOTS**



The Spirit of Community

“**E**conomic development,” I recently suggested to one small-town mayor, “is first a reflection of community pride and enthusiasm.”

I’ve learned this rule by observing popular Texas travel destinations. If you want your community to draw visitors, first enthusiastically document its unique traits. Don’t take anything for granted. Even though you’ve driven past the same century-old buildings for years, that doesn’t mean that a visitor might not find the buildings worth a stop.

So community spirit means understanding local history and sharing the story. That creative fire can be sparked by an individual who is willing to take action following personal vision and energy.

Win a Boerne getaway! Details on page 4.

One recent example of such an individual project involves a century-old church that sits along US 281 near the community of Selden, between Hico and Stephenville.

The white frame building, shuttered by the dwindling congregation, faced an uncertain future. The original structure was built just after 1900. A tornado took it mostly down about 50 years later, but the congregation rebuilt. Would it experience another rebirth?

The church (previously Pleasant Hill Methodist) sits adjacent to the ranch owned by Jane Hickie, who lives a few miles away. She made the decision to acquire the church property and organize a renovation. Long story short, the reenergized building, with landscaping, decks, and audio-visual capability, is now The Venable Center (thevenablecenter.com), named for the family that originally donated the land for the church and the nearby Indian Creek Cemetery.

In early June, members of the congregation gathered to tell stories of the old days and listen to the Bosque River Boys perform old-time favorites. I asked a member of the band about why the church was special to him and he said, “We used to come out here all the time for Sunday singing.” Clearly a gem of local history.

In personal accounts of church history, one woman said that her mother had been married in the church, she had been married in the church, and now she hoped her daughter could be married in the same building. Proof that the old church held memories for those with roots in the community. That’s the kind of preservation that builds community spirit. And economic impact.

Charles Lohrmann, Publisher



WHERE WE’LL BE NEXT MONTH:

September’s special issue celebrates the People, the Places, and the Wide-Open Spaces of Texas, with a spotlight on this year’s Extraordinary Texans, along with writers’ favorite destinations and photographers’ top vistas across the state.

We’ll kayak at McKinney Roughs, go gumbo at the Medina Lake Cajun Festival, and dip into Texas’ oil industry—olive oil, that is. And there are more Top 40 winners to come!



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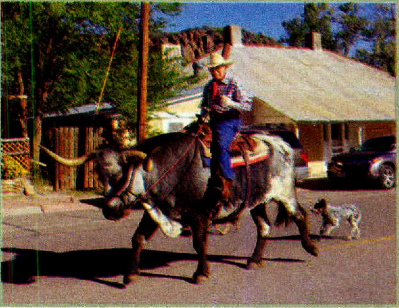


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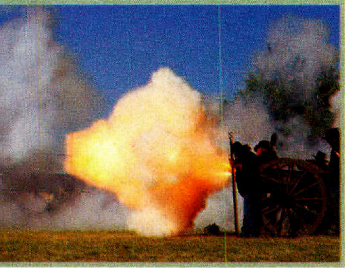
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EVENTS

- Aug - Live at Zero Stone Concert Series - **Fort Stockton**
- Aug - Summer Off the Patio Concert Series - **Fort Stockton**
- Aug 1-9 - *In the Heights* Musical @ Permian Playhouse - **Odessa**
- Aug 3 - 29th Annual Cantaloupe Fly-in - **Pecos**
- Aug 7-9 - Rock the Desert - **Odessa**
- Aug 18 - Relay for Life - **Pecos**
- Aug 21-23 - Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival - **Fort Davis**

- Aug 24 - 3 Doors Down Acoustic - **Midland**
- Aug 29-31 - Marfa Lights Festival - **Marfa**
- Aug 30-Sep 1 - Big Bend Balloon Bash - **Alpine**
- Aug 31 - Sunrise at Chinati - **Marfa**
- Sep 19-21 - PAFRA World Final Rodeo - **Midland**
- Sep 26-27 - Frontier and Mule Days - **Fort Davis**
- Nov 21-22 - ARTWALK - **Alpine**

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AUGUST 2014

The **PEOPLE**, the **PLACES**, and **WIDE-OPEN SPACES** of 

32

TEXAS TOP 40

Closing in on the Top 10

From steamy bayous to arid canyons, the latest round of Texas Top 40 Travel Destinations proves that Texas travelers can have their cheesecake, and eat it too.

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Possum Kingdom Reborn

With remarkable natural beauty, an easygoing spirit, and a range of appealing amenities, Possum Kingdom Lake has overcome the damaging wildfires of 2011. That's why we keep coming back.

Text by JUNE NAYLOR
Photographs by WILL VAN OVERBEEK

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The Garden of Yes



The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's new Luci and Ian Family Garden encourages kids to climb, scoop, and splash their way to a lifelong appreciation for nature.

Text by ANDREA ABEL
Photographs by J. GRIFFIS SMITH

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An Interwoven Legacy

With New World roots stretching back 400 years, the Guerra family of South Texas preserves regional culture by showcasing artistic treasures of the past and present.

Text by GENE FOWLER
Photographs by WILL VAN OVERBEEK

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Senior Editor Lori Moffatt
Associate Editor Matt Joyce
Editorial Coordinator Cindy Newsom
Contributing Editors
Erin Inks, Julie Stratton
Editorial Associates*
Grace Carrier, James Rambin

Photography Editor J. Griffis Smith
Photography Editor Brandon Jakobeit
Contributing Photographers
Michael Amador, Kevin Stillman,
Will van Overbeek
Video Producer Chris Lewis

Art Director Jane Wu
Associate Art Director Kirsti Harms

Web Editor Lois M. Rodriguez
Digital Art Director Matt Wetzler
Web Associate* Courtney Ley

Audience Development Manager
Cindy Leffingwell

Marketing Manager Joan Henderson
Operations Manager Deborah Follien
Advertising Coordinator Lupe Valdez
Account Services Raquel V. Sanchez
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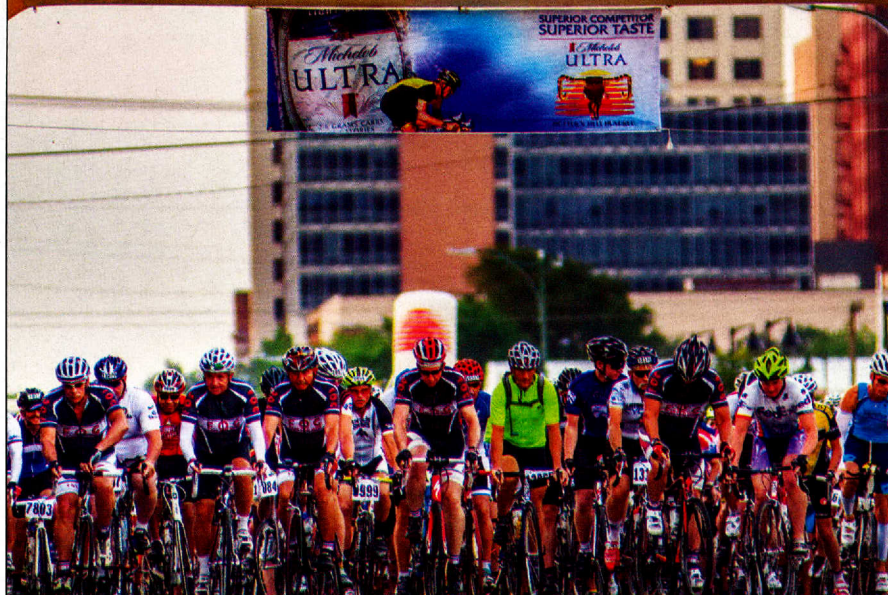
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- PLAY!** • Admission for two at Cave Without A Name
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• One-hour Hill Country horseback ride for two at Stricker Trail Rides
• Gift Certificate for Captain Turquand's Saloon at the
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Bureau and their partners for these fabulous prizes!



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GETAWAY!

AUGUST 2014

The **PEOPLE**, the **PLACES**, and **WIDE-OPEN SPACES** of 



DEPARTMENTS

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Elm Lake at Brazos Bend State Park

8) Merge

Reader love for bakeries, family camping

DRIVE

9) Made in Texas

Boots the rock-and-roll way in El Paso

12) Texas Wild

The bats of Bracken Cave

14) Detour

Sisterdale's Hill Country solitude

16) Souvenir

Coonskin caps at the Alamo

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Taking on the Big Texan steak challenge

25) Eat

Barbecue with soul in Tyler

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A desert swimming oasis—with fish

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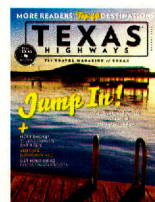
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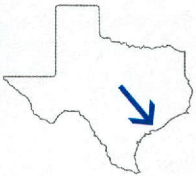
ON OUR COVERS

FRONT: The waters of Possum Kingdom Lake beckon at a lakeside dock in the Golden Cove area. Photo © Kenny Braun

BACK: The Hill Country Grotto at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's new Lucian and Ian Family Garden. Photo by J. Griffith Smith

Scenic ROUTE

29° 22' 28.25" N
95° 36' 47.66" W



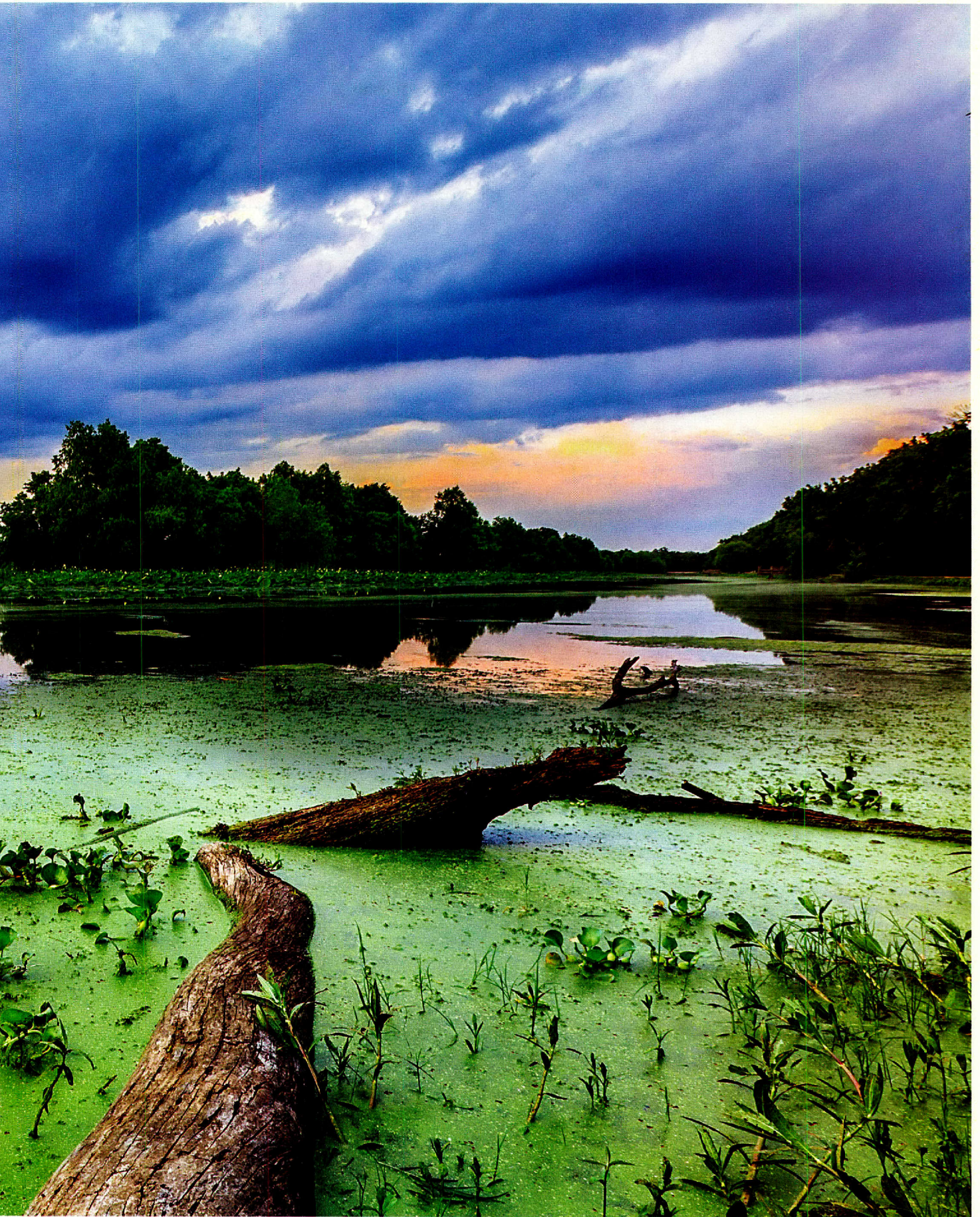
Gulf Coast

From the entrance of Brazos Bend State Park off FM 762 in Needville, follow Park Road 72 as it winds through the park and then heads west to the parking area for Elm Lake. Take a short walk along the western side of the lake on the Elm Lake Loop Trail to the lake's southwestern corner. Watch for alligators for photos, but keep a safe distance. The park also is home to the George Observatory, which hosts public viewings on Saturdays. See the Texas Top 40 countdown on page 32 for more park information.



For a park map, visit
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/brazos-bend/map.





MERGE

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

If you're a Texan, you have to be part of the Texas Highways family!

ROBIN FINCH, TH Facebook Fan in Beaumont



OUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH...



The Longhorn Herd at the Fort Worth Stockyards are the tamest big babies you'll ever see. I wouldn't dare challenge those beautiful horns, though!

Suzanne Linder Martin, Beaumont

Why build a maze at Natural Bridge Caverns? Just turn people loose in the caverns and turn off the lights!

Scott Alexander Thornton, Grand Bay, Alabama



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Family Camping

I have so many amazing memories of camping with my family, and cousins, and friends [Travel Matters, July]. Growing up in the great outdoors was awesome! My husband and I still love to camp, when we have the chance to do so.

VICKI MANN-HAWTHORNE,
TH Facebook fan

I love camping with my family. Every summer until I was 15 we spent nearly our entire vacation going camping. We were blessed to live in Northern California where lakes and campgrounds abounded. My older brother was quite over the whole "family bonding time" by age 12, however, and began to boycott our trips. My granddaughter will also be taught the ways of tent camping, campfire cooking, and fishing for dinner. I can't wait.

BARBARA DEES, Driftwood

Bakery Buff

A good bakery really improves a town [Next Weekend, June]. My father, Joe Surma, came to San Antonio in 1943

after serving in Europe during World War II. Joe and his brothers previously had a bakery in their hometown of Chicago. With his wife, Margie Kosub, Joe opened Surma's Bakery in 1948 on Nogalitos Street. The bakery thrived for 46 years, baking everything from scratch. What has evolved with big grocery stores and their in-store bakeries is that folks want to do one-stop shopping, but that takes away from the mom-and-pop shops. It's fine, but it's not the same as the real homemade stuff we had years ago.

BOB SURMA, Fredericksburg

Horse Sense

My first experiences as a kid riding horses were in the Davis Mountains [Texas Family, June]. I was in first grade when I rode my first horse, Big Red. My second horse was Trixie, a beautiful black horse with a patch of white on her nose and some spirit! I must have been a little older and I decided I wanted Trixie to run. I got her going and before I knew it we were off across the open range! It was a grand moment, and I've never forgotten that wonderful feeling.

BRETT McCALLY DAVIS,
TH Facebook fan



READERS RECOMMEND

Wild About Waring's Burgers

The Waring Country Store in Kendall County has the best hamburgers and cheeseburgers I've ever eaten. And if that's not enough, it's worth stopping to meet the owners, Carol and Ed Patton.

PATRICK POWERS, Kerrville

The Waring Country Store is at 539 Waring/Welfare Road, about 13 miles northwest of Boerne. The restaurant opens daily from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The store, with snacks, drinks, pies, and gifts, closes at 3 p.m. Call 830/995-3176.



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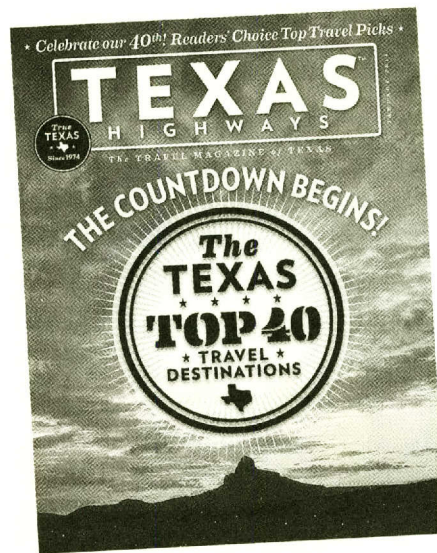
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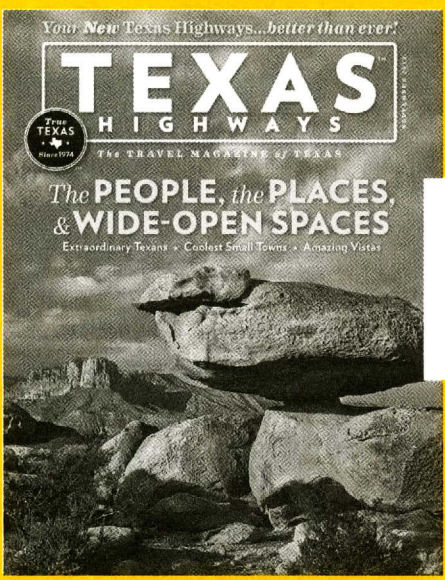
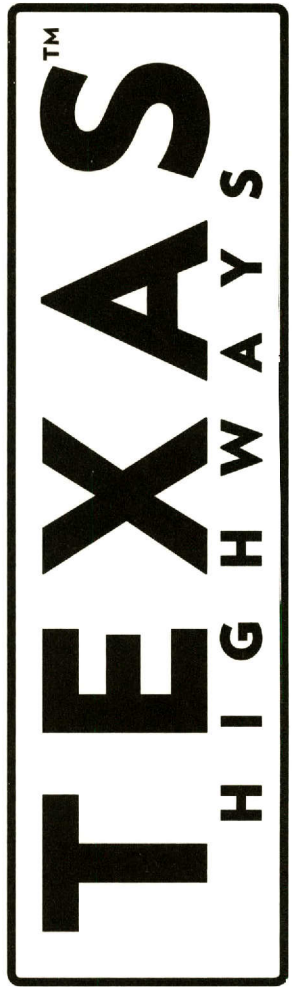
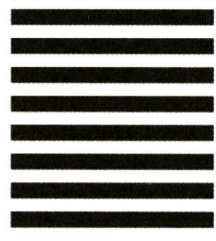
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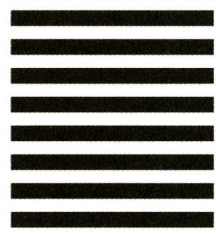
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ROCKETBUSTER HANDMADE CUSTOM BOOTS

text by MATT JOYCE



ROCKIN' THE DETAILS

No design idea is too wild for a pair of Rocketbuster custom cowboy boots. If you can't make it to El Paso, check out the company's Facebook page for photos and video of the bootmakers at work.

NEVENA CHRISTI POINTS TO A label painted on a brick wall inside the El Paso workshop of Rocketbuster Handmade Custom Boots. “Wildcat,” it says. Elsewhere in the 1900 warehouse, similar labels mark sections for ocelots, badgers, and rats. “The building was a trappers’ warehouse,” Nevena explains. “The names of animals are written all over the walls, so the building has always had a history in leather, let’s put it that way.”

Leatherworking lives on at this weathered warehouse in El Paso’s revitalized Union Plaza district, although the trappers of yore would never recognize the visual cacophony that characterizes the interior today. Its walls shining with colorful displays, such as a neon cowboy astraddle a rocket, Rocketbuster’s home—open for tours by appointment—is a brassy shrine to Western kitsch and funky creativity. The not-so-subtle intention of all this artistic spunk? To inspire a new generation of custom bootmakers to make one-of-a-kind boots, and to preserve an American tradition that risks irrelevance in an age of mechanized mass production.

“This industry is dying,” says Nevena, the “boss lady” of Rocketbuster. “The supplies are getting harder to find, everything’s going to China, and all these old guys are retiring. It’s



ROCKETBUSTER HANDMADE CUSTOM BOOTS

is at 115 Anthony St. in El Paso. Tours by appointment. Call 915/541-1300; www.rocketbuster.com.

not just a business for old men who have done it forever. Bootmaking has got to be fun for young people, and if it doesn’t become cool and rock-and-roll to young people, it will die.”

Nevena’s mission to preserve custom bootmaking stems from her experience as an artist who became enamored with the traditional craft. In the 1980s and ’90s, she was working in the fashion industry in New York City, designing cocktail dresses for Nicole Miller, when she asked Rocketbuster owner Marty Snortum to make a series of boots for a runway show. (Marty, an El Paso photographer, acquired the boot business in a 1989 barroom trade of his 1953 Cadillac Hearse.) Introduced through the runway project, Marty and Nevena fell in love and married. In 1997, Nevena moved to El Paso and took over Rocketbuster.

“I come from a graphic design and fashion design background, so my patterns are intricate and complicated,” Nevena says. “I like to draw original



designs to fit each person's legs."

During a tour of Rocketbuster, visitors can see Nevena and her eight employees bring those drawings to life in the form of custom cowboy boots, from square-toed to rounded or pointy. Working at broad workbenches, the craftspeople cut, paint, and stitch leather into remarkably artful boots that depict anything a customer can dream up, from family crests to hometown homages, religious icons, cowboys, skeletons, and peacock feathers. (The workshop displays shelves of boots bearing fanciful designs, but they're all samples. To get your own pair, you've got to place an order.) Nevena says a recent challenge was designing a pair of boots for Willie Nelson's 80th birthday, including a map of his life and the words and music to "On the Road Again."

"How are you going to make that look good?" Nevena says. "It's total insanity, but I usually pull these things off."

Rocketbuster's ability to create cowboy boots that translate the footwear's iconic appeal to new and young customers is Nevena's great skill, says Jennifer June, author of the 2007 book *Cowboy Boots: The Art and Sole*.

"Rocketbuster gets pegged as retro and vintage all the time, but they're really not," Jennifer says. "Nevena can do that if she wants, but she has the ability to take symbols of luck and chance, or risk and danger, and update them so that they mean something now. It's things like that that allow people to see themselves in cowboy boots, and it's not their dad's boots or their grandpa's boots."

Nevena may have taken an unconventional path to bootmaking, but she says that El Paso remains the best place to run a custom boot company. Bootmaking here enjoys a long history: Situated along the route of westward cattle drives in the mid-1800s, El Paso provided plenty of raw material for leatherworking. Drawn to the western boomtown, pioneer craftsmen discovered high demand among cowboys and cavalymen for leather goods like saddles, [continued on page 62 »



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From March through October, more than 10 million Mexican free-tailed bats make Bracken Cave their home. It's the largest bat colony in the world.

To the *Bat Cave!*

WINGING IT AT BRACKEN CAVE NEAR SAN ANTONIO

text by **Michael Marks**

I'M THINKING TO MYSELF, "THAT CAVE DOESN'T look big enough for all those bats."

The cave in question is Bracken Cave, the heart of a 697-acre property adjacent to Natural Bridge Caverns, Texas' largest network of publicly accessible caves. Located about 25 miles northeast of San Antonio, the Bracken Cave acreage is owned by Bat Conservation International (BCI), an Austin-based conservation group dedicated to preserving bat populations and their ecosystems. It's a land rich in wildlife, including golden-cheeked warblers and painted buntings, but people know Bracken Cave for its bats. From March through October, more than 10 million Mexican free-tailed bats make Bracken Cave their home. It is, in fact, the largest bat colony in the world.

Watching them emerge from the cave is truly a one-of-a-kind experience. "These days it's kind of hard to wow kids, but this does it," says Fran Hutchins, the Bracken Cave Preserve



BRACKEN CAVE

bat emergence tours take place for the general public (\$25) May through October. For information about tours and about Bat Conservation International, see www.batcon.org/bracken.

Director for BCI. "It's a spectacular sight." Hutchins and his team of expert volunteers offer summertime opportunities to watch the bats emerge from the cave to feed on insects throughout the Hill Country.

Like the other bat colonies in Texas, including Austin's million-member roost beneath the Congress Avenue bridge, the Bracken bats play a crucial role in the ecosystem. They reduce the need for pesticides by keeping the insect population down, and are a food source for predators like snakes, owls, and hawks. "Without the bats, the thousands of acres of crops south of San Antonio would be overrun with agricultural pests," says Hutchins.

“On an average night, each bat can eat its weight in insects. The farmers are thankful for them, for sure.”

Mexican free-tailed bats spend the winter in Mexico and Central America, where they mate, and then return north in the spring, dispersing in male “bachelor colonies” and female “maternity colonies” throughout the southern United States. Evidence suggests that Bracken’s maternity colony has existed for more than 10,000 years. By mid-June, millions of pregnant bats will have given birth, doubling the population.

It’s hard to imagine how so many bats live in such close quarters. Surrounded by a deep bowl of live oaks and prickly pear cacti, Bracken Cave is— at 650 feet long by 100 feet wide—really just a sink-hole. Once the pups are born, up to 500 bats will share a space the size of the page you’re reading right now. It’s normal for the bats to be in such close proximity, but according to BCI docent Coco

Brennan, Bracken’s hot, humid environment makes it particularly cozy for the baby bats. “It can be more than 104 degrees inside the cave,” Brennan says. “It’s like a giant incubator.”

As I wait for the bats to emerge, sitting on wooden benches with a few dozen other bat-watchers, the air is thick with anticipation. And thick with something else, too—the pungent smell of bat guano, which wafts up from inside the cave. We’re not the only ones waiting; I notice a red-tailed hawk perched in a tree 40 yards behind the cave, biding his time until dinner.

It’s close to 8:30 now, and the sunset’s pink streaks fade to darker shades of purple. As I peer through my binoculars, I hear excited whispers around me. “I see them, I see them! They’re coming!”

Thousands of bats appear at once, pouring through the mouth of the cave in a streaming, vibrating current. We whip out our cameras and climb onto

the benches, craning our necks for a better look.

The bats fly in a circle, resembling a tornado as they gain altitude and fly southeast. It will take four hours for all of them to emerge from the cave, and though the regular tours end when the sun sets, BCI offers opportunities to spend more time at Bracken Cave, including overnight campouts that allow you to see the bats return in the morning.

Most people trickle back toward their vehicles at nightfall, but I stick around for a while longer. The early summer evening feels cool, and I can feel a slight breeze from the bats’ wings as they propel themselves upward. The millions of flapping wings patter like a soft, constant rain, interrupted only by the occasional screech of red-tailed hawks. To the south, I can see the lights of San Antonio, and I know that millions of bats are flying in the skies overhead—just as they have for centuries. ★

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Sisterdale's *Secrets*

DON'T BLINK AND MISS THIS HILL COUNTRY HAVEN

text by **Michelle Burgess**

IF OTTMAR VON BEHR HAD GOTTEN HIS WAY 155 years ago, Sisterdale would look a whole lot different than the tiny town it turned out to be.

Early settler von Behr, a naturalist and meteorologist, was one of the men who championed Sisterdale's petition to be the county seat when Kendall County was organized in 1859. He and his brethren—German intellectuals who fled their mother country after being persecuted for their support for equality and human rights—imagined that the designation would bring attention and commerce to their secluded, bucolic burg.



SISTERDALE

Unincorporated Sisterdale is in Kendall County at the intersection of farm roads 473 and 1376, a 45-minute drive north of San Antonio.

Alas, it was not to be. Neighboring Boerne, 13 miles down the road, snagged the county seat. And whether there's a direct correlation or not, we know what happened to Boerne—steady growth and eventual status as one of the Hill Country's top tourist destinations.

What happened to Sisterdale? Well, on the face of it, not much. But for the few locals who make their home here, and for the visitors who seek it out, Sisterdale's lost-in-time Hill



COUNTRY STYLE

Sisterdale Market, located on Sisterdale Road/FM 1376, opens daily except Sundays. The shop sells groceries, animal feed, and collectibles.

For the few locals who make their home here, and for the visitors who seek it out, Sisterdale's lost-in-time Hill Country solitude constitutes its appeal.

Country solitude constitutes its appeal.

Sisterdale's population peaked in 1884 at 150, when it sustained a cotton gin, shingle mill, grocery store, dance-hall/opera house, post office, and school. A boll weevil infestation put the gin out of business in the 1920s, and, except for the dancehall, Sisterdale's other businesses also fell away over the years. So did its people.

Today, the population hovers around 30, and the folks who travel along this half-mile stretch of Farm Road 1376 generally fall into three categories. There are the motorcyclists who appreciate the gorgeous scenery and sparse traffic on this route connecting Boerne to Fredericksburg, the locals who prefer this route over taking the highway, and the tourists who stumble upon it when they stray too far from Boerne or get lost trying to find nearby Luckenbach.

What they encounter is, really, a wide place in the road in the truest sense of the phrase. Sisterdale's buildings barely number over a dozen, and if you want pizza or gas or an ATM, you're out of luck. There are no fancy restaurants, no salons, no outlet stores.

But those dozen or so buildings that make up the Sisterdale Valley District have been included in the National Register of Historic Places since 1975. The old cotton gin looks like it did 100 years ago, only now it houses Sister Creek Vineyards. The Sisterdale Dance Hall is an event venue, host to weddings and parties most weekends. The quaint old homes along the road have been maintained—not razed or updated with granite and stainless steel—and are home to an artisanal candle store (Marlowe Candle Company), an antiques and gourmet food shop (Armadillo Haus), and a place

to buy groceries, feed, and knick-knacks (Sisterdale Market).

The winery bookends the town on one end, the Sisterdale Saloon on the other. The atmosphere at the winery is friendly and a bit elegant, while the vibe at the saloon can be a little raucous, though equally affable. There's pool and shuffleboard, a jukebox for when there's no live music, and two stages. Seated at the 111-year-old, oak-topped bar, you'll encounter a mostly local crowd of revelers, along with weekend-warrior and retiree motorcyclists who are happy to shoot the breeze with strangers.

Just outside of town, on the road west to Kandalia, visitors will find Paniolo Ranch, a spa and B&B with spacious guest quarters, privacy, and some of the best views in the entire Hill Country. Created by a transplanted Houstonian with ties to Hawaii—*paniolo* means cowboy in Hawaiian—the ranch hosts weddings and events, and is tailor-made for intimate getaways, such as a girls' weekend, couples' trips, and sanity-saving excursions for anyone who craves some rest and relaxation.

"For a little town, you'd be surprised how much activity there is on the weekend," says Judy Kennell, owner of Paniolo Ranch. "During the day it may be a blink-of-the-eye, but on a weekend night, you'd think you'd hit the big city lights."

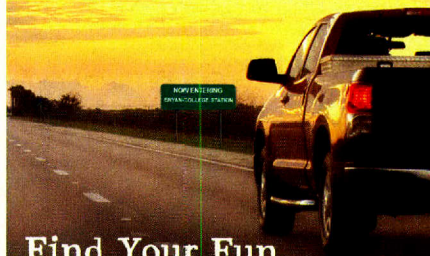
The weekend activity only enhances Sisterdale's appeal as a solo, leave-the-phone-behind, escape-from-real-life holiday. Start with wine tasting at one end, finish with a beer at the other, and pick up a rosemary-scented candle and vintage poster in a reclaimed-wood frame on the way. It's pretty much a guarantee that you'll end your half-mile trek having met a few people—either fellow visitors or locals who are more than happy to talk about the town and their place in it.

Ask the handful of people who call Sisterdale home whether they'd like their town to be a bigger player on the tourism scene, and they'll say they're glad to remain the area's best-kept secret for as long as it lasts. Even without the courthouse. ★

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Crockett's Coonskin Cap

ICONIC HATS AT THE ALAMO

text by **Melissa Gaskill**

The Alamo gift shop rings up some 15,000 coonskin cap purchases a year, making it the shop's best-selling item.

THE ALAMO. UTTER THOSE WORDS AND NEARLY EVERY Texan sees in their mind an iconic image: rugged and defiant Davy Crockett wearing buckskins and a coonskin cap. Well, actually most of us envision either Fess Parker or John Wayne *playing* Davy Crockett, but the outfit remains essentially the same.

On a recent visit to San Antonio, I browsed the Alamo's gift shop and what should I find but a rack of fur caps with striped tails, looking as if they just fell off of old Davy's head. This brought to mind the question: Did Crockett actually wear a coonskin cap during his brief and tragic time at the Alamo?

A definitive answer is lost to history, but there's a reasonable chance that Crockett did. Support for this assertion comes from Davy Crockett's daughter, Matilda, who was about 14 years old when Crockett left Tennessee for Texas in October 1835. Matilda would later write of the last time she saw her father, "He was dressed in his hunting suit, wearing a coonskin cap, and carrying a fine rifle presented to him by friends in Philadelphia." Crockett entered Texas in January 1836, and died three months later at the Alamo on March 6.

Further cap-wearing evidence comes by way of Susanna Dickinson, one of the few survivors of the Alamo siege. In an 1875 interview, Dickinson said, "I recog-



THE ALAMO, at 300 Alamo Plaza in San Antonio, opens every day except Dec. 24-25. Admission is free; audio tours are \$7; battlefield tours are \$15; VIP tours are \$40. Call 210/225-1391; www.thealamo.org.



nized Colonel Crockett lying dead and mutilated ... and even remember seeing his peculiar cap lying by his side." At the time, "peculiar" meant particular to him, or simply, Crockett's hat, explains John Richardson, a tour guide at the Alamo who also leads in-depth Alamo battlefield analyses for groups.

The siege took place in winter when it could be cold, even in South Texas—a fact borne out by the Mexican army's weather records, which showed temperatures ranging from the lower 60s to upper 30s. Furthermore, while Crockett didn't wear buckskins about the halls of Congress while serving there, he likely would have donned them for traveling the frontier in winter, and it's no stretch to assume his wardrobe included a fur cap to keep his head warm. Raccoon was a common material for winter caps in those days.


The Alamo gift shop rings up some 15,000 coonskin cap purchases a year, making it the shop's best-selling item. Richardson says he sees a lot of youngsters and grown people walking the Alamo grounds wearing them. The day of my Alamo visit was on the cool side, but when I lined up at the entrance for my guided tour, I didn't see any coonskin. Of course, most people visit the gift shop at the end of the tour, so my fellow tourists probably hadn't seen them yet.

Most of the 1.5 million people who visit each year simply wander the grounds, including the church and the Long Barrack, but the Alamo's 45-minute audio tours enhance the experience with music, sound effects, and interviews that bring the history to life. Even more enriching are the Alamo's



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battlefield and VIP tours, led by history interpreters like Richardson, who possesses a wealth of trivia and knowledge.

The Alamo shrine and the historic Long Barrack sit on 4.2 verdant acres, surrounded by downtown San Antonio. The two structures are all that remain of the old fortified mission compound that occupied the site at the time of the 1836 battle. We followed Richardson through the heavy wooden doors into the hallowed Spanish missionary church, where Susanna Dickinson and other survivors huddled in the sacristy as they listened to the battle raging outside. We stood before a display listing the names of the Alamo defenders and gazed upon a rifle that Crockett had sold en route to Texas.

Across a small garden and past an enormous oak tree lies the restored Long Barrack, which served as the missionaries' quarters and later was the last stronghold of many Texian rebels

Did Davy Crockett actually wear a coonskin cap during his brief and tragic time at the Alamo? A definitive answer is lost to history, but there's a reasonable chance that he did.

before the Alamo fell to Santa Anna's soldiers. The exhibit inside chronicles Alamo history from 1718—when the Spanish established Mission San Antonio de Valero at this site—to 20th-Century preservation efforts. Artifacts on display include a collection of muskets and rifles, a sword presented to Santa Anna, Sam Houston's shaving mug, and a book of literature that belonged to Colonel William B. Travis. It's a moving experience to walk the length of

the low-slung limestone building and see these bits and pieces of significant Texas history.

Exiting the Long Barrack at the end of the tour, I walked back to the gift shop. The state constructed the gift-shop building in 1937 as one of nine Texas Centennial Museums honoring the 100th anniversary of Texas independence. The Daughters of the Republic of Texas now use it to sell souvenirs to bring in revenue for upkeep and operation of the Alamo, which is funded solely by gift-shop sales, tour fees, and donations. Buying a coonskin cap for \$12.99 seemed an appropriate way to contribute. Next visit, I'll even wear it. ★



FIND MORE ONLINE

See a *TH* video about Alamo preservation and the descendants of Alamo defenders at texashighways.com/souvenir.



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A Juicy Tale

THE FRUTERÍA BOTANERO
IN SAN ANTONIO

text by ANTHONY HEAD



IF YOU LIKE PIÑACATE

Served in a martini glass rimmed with chile and salt, the Piñacate features a mix of tequila, citrus, pineapple, and avocado.



DRINK

A FLAVOR INFUSION

To add complexity to the unusual cocktails on the menu, the Frutería Botanero infuses spirits with cucumbers, pineapple, and other fruits and vegetables.

NO MATTER WHAT TASK he's engaged in—slicing limes, shaking cocktails, restocking the three-tiered tequila case—bartender Robert Varela pivots from what he's doing behind the bar at San Antonio's Frutería Botanero to greet guests with a welcoming bellow, "Bienvenido. Welcome."

And the congenial attitude makes sense, since this fresh venture by chef and restaurateur Johnny Hernandez was inspired by the fruit stands that dot Mexico's interior, which also serve as community gathering spots. This is a polished version of a frutería, to be sure, with patio seating outside and stained concrete floors and colorful artwork inside, including a vibrant mobile of hummingbirds in flight. During the daytime, non-alcoholic refreshments such as fresh-squeezed juices, *aguas frescas*, fruit cups, and *licuados* (the latter similar to smoothies) make use of fruits and vegetables sourced at a farmers market barely a quarter mile away. And at night, these same mangoes, limes, carrots,



THE FRUTERÍA BOTANERO

is at 1401 S. Flores, #102, in San Antonio. Call 210/251-3104; www.chefjohnnyhernandez.com.

berries, and other produce add zing to the Frutería's ambitious bar program.

"We do real handcrafted drinks," Varela says. "Although we can certainly prepare standards like martinis and whisky sours, the majority of people don't come for basic drinks."

With that, he slides a libation called a Jarrito across the bar. Usually made with fresh-squeezed orange, lime, and grapefruit juices with silver tequila, Varela likes to substitute a house specialty for the basic tequila: silver tequila infused with red and yellow sweet peppers, plus jalapeño, habanero, Anaheim, and poblano chiles. Garnished with fresh citrus and red pepper slices, the Jarrito is a refreshing and intensely flavored drink, delivering both tequila and chile flavors, but without the sting of either.

Varela recommends it with the *ceviche rojo* (diced fish in lime juice and salt,

served with pico de gallo and a sauce made of roasted red peppers and chiptole), but there are many tempting options, such as stuffed chiles and salads, all made with fresh produce. But the simple, fresh dishes of the Frutería are only half of the food story here.

"We introduced two concepts under one roof," says Chef Hernandez, who joins me at the bar, "because in Mexico the fruterías only do breakfast and lunch. Instead of closing, in the evening our space becomes a *botanero*, and we serve small plates and nightly dinner specials."

As is evident here and at his other culinary projects around San Antonio, which include La Gloria and a new restaurant called El Machito, Hernandez greatly admires the street foods of Mexico. He includes quesadillas, gorditas, and chilapitas on his menus, along with more elegant dishes like pork with roasted tomatillos and chicken in chile almond sauce.

"Traveling through Mexico for many years, I became captivated with the breadth and depth of the cuisine, and I dreamed of presenting it with a chef's discipline and focus. Street foods change from region to region, but cooks always use what is freshest," Hernandez tells me.

Besides abundant fresh fruits and vegetables, the "frutería-inspired" cocktail menu features an additional common theme: tequila. "It's 90 percent or more tequila-based," says Hernandez. "I really love tequila. I want to promote it."

Of course, nobody has to school Texans about the appeal of tequila. Yet despite the state's relative proximity to the Mexican state of Jalisco, where tequila has been produced since the 16th Century, many Texans are still only beginning to consider it in the same league as say, Scotch or bourbon. Today's producers strive for quality and craftsmanship, and Hernandez hand-selects his tequilas for their unusual styles and complex flavor profiles.

Of the 16 cocktails on the Frutería's

During the daytime, non-alcoholic refreshments such as fresh-squeezed juices and *aguas frescas* make use of fruits and vegetables sourced at the local farmers market.

drinks menu, only three are margaritas. Two are made with fresh juices and house-infused tequilas and one is a vodka-based cucumber drink (which might be breaking some kind of international treaty by being named a "margarita"). "People think that tequila and margaritas are synonymous," says Hernandez. "Look at this one," he says, pointing at the menu to a cocktail called the Moretón, which is made with muddled berries, almond liqueur, and tequila reposado. "I hear people say they love our 'blackberry margarita' all the time."

The Moretón is another example of fresh flavors pairing unexpectedly well with tequila, but there are drinks on the menu that take even greater creative leaps. "I wanted to have a drink with avocado in it," Hernandez says of his unusual Piñacate. "But I didn't want it to be something that you could stick a tostada in, like a guacamole." He hoped to keep the flavor in the background, more as a foundation. "Mexican food is very balanced," he continues. "There's not supposed to be a superstar in the recipe. The avocado complements the other flavors all the way through."

The Piñacate cocktail is all about avocado, pineapple, and citrus flavors. The Herradura Single Barrel tequila cuts through the drink's creaminess, while the salt, sugar, and dried chile pasilla on the glass's rim adds a dusting of earthy warmth to the experience. But for the bar chef's sake, please don't call it an "avocado martini." ★

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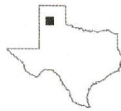
AN IRISHMAN TEARS INTO THE BIG TEXAN STEAK CHALLENGE

text by **Rob Curran** illustration by **Brian Ajhar**

IF THERE WERE A RITE OF PASSAGE INTO the Texan tribe, surely it would be the 72-ounce steak challenge at The Big Texan Steak Ranch in Amarillo. Could anything be bigger, or more Texan? To an Irishman raised on Western flicks like myself, the very name Amarillo conjures up images of tumbleweeds, rattlesnakes, and yodeling cowboys.

As Bobby Lee, the longtime owner of The Big Texan, puts it: "If you go to Hawaii, you expect to see girls in grass skirts; if you come to Texas, you want to see cowboys and big steaks."

With a recent family trip to Amarillo on the calendar, I decided the time had come for me to burnish my Texan

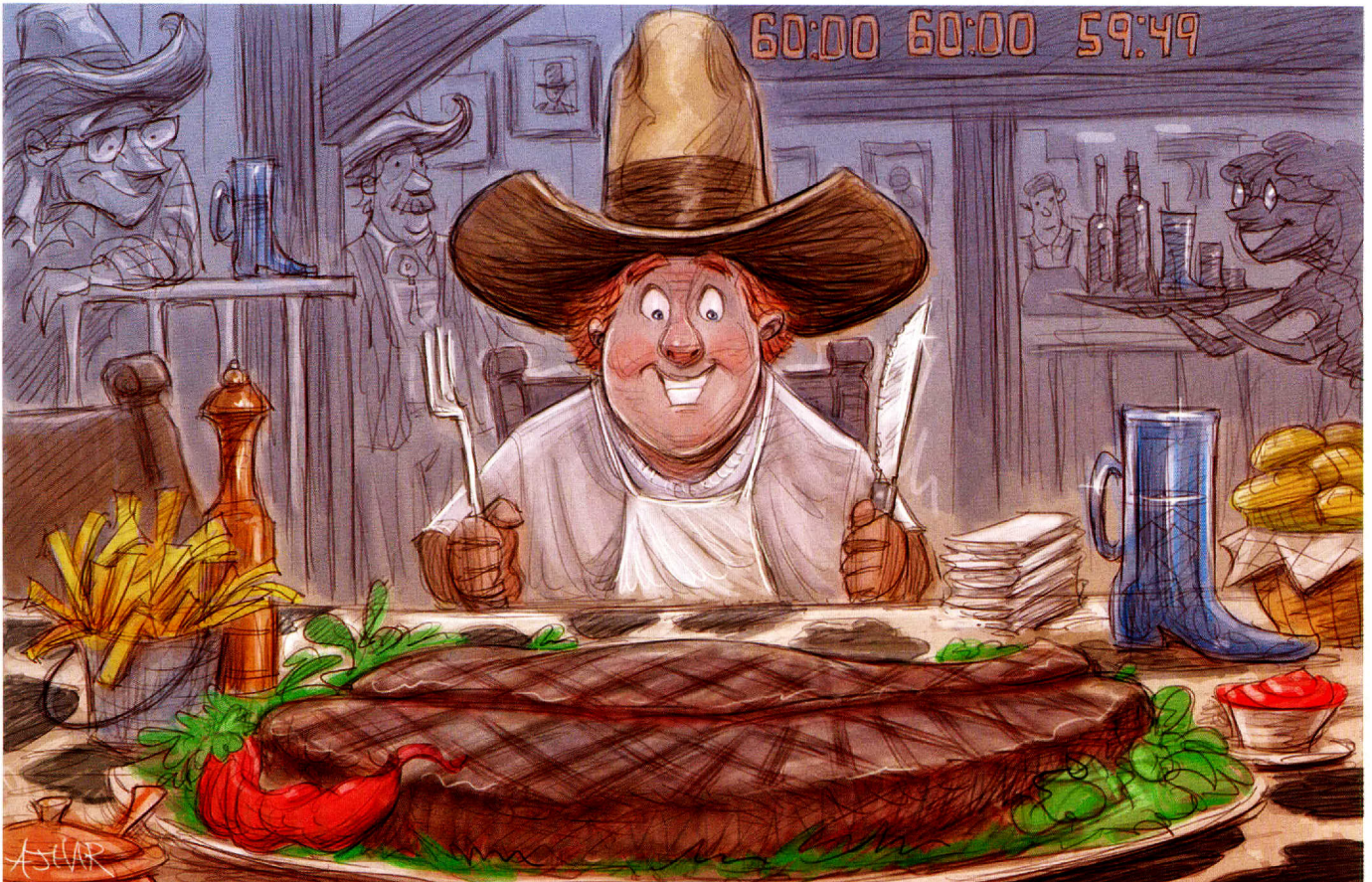


THE BIG TEXAN STEAK RANCH

is at 7701 Interstate 40 in Amarillo. The restaurant also has a microbrewery, motel, and gift shop. Call 806/372-6000; www.bigtexan.com.

credentials by tackling the 72-ounce steak challenge. Sure, I've lived in Texas for 10 years, married a Texan, and am raising two proud Texan daughters. But I've never eaten more than a half-pound of meat in one sitting, much less a four-and-a-half-pound steak.

My mentor in the challenge was my brother-in-law, a big Texan who has matched me turkey leg for turkey leg in any number of multi-plate Thanksgiving dinners. John is a veteran of the challenge (he came up short) and impressed on me the gravity of the quest I



had just undertaken over several bowls of chili one evening.

“You’ve got an hour to do it,” he explained. “Hell, it’d take you an hour just to cut that thing into bite-size chunks! And you’ve got to finish the sides, too. They give you a baked potato the size of a bowling ball... Here, get another bowl of chili. You’re in training!”

Seeking more instructive advice, I found the website of Randy Santel, a decorated “competitive eater” with a track record of downing multi-pound piles of meat. Santel advises approaching his discipline much like ninjas approach theirs—start with modest goals and raise the bar gradually until you are capable of great feats.

Santel recommends working on two fronts of stomach-expansion, beginning one week before the challenge: eating progressively larger meals and drinking progressively larger amounts of water. About five days out, I inhaled a full Irish breakfast of sausage, eggs, and bacon—followed by a beef potpie for dessert.

About 18 hours before the challenge, I followed Santel’s recommendation to eat a large but easily digestible meal. Santel usually devours a large watermelon; I opted for several large bowls of muesli. Then I chugged two pints of water. I was ready.

I saw my first billboard for the “Free 72-ounce Steak Dinner” not long after I left my home in Denton, still five hours from Amarillo. Truckers can pick up the trail as far afield as California, where The Big Texan has billboards advertising the challenge.

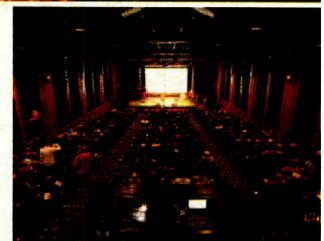
Eating contests are as American as apple pie, but The Big Texan’s steak

The Big Texan’s 72-ounce steak meal is only free if you eat it entirely. Non-finishers must pay the full \$72 cost. Only about 15 percent of contestants finish the steak and side dishes.

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offer was one of the first restaurant-based food challenges. When Bobby's father, R.J. Lee, opened The Big Texan on historic Route 66 in 1960, he soon realized that tourists loved to watch the cowboys from the local stockyards one-up each other at the dinner table.

The direct inspiration for the challenge was a wager: One day, a group of regulars each threw a dollar into a

Molly Schuyler, a 125-pound woman from Nebraska, ate the 72-ounce steak meal in 4:58 this May, setting a new record. In the ensuing 10 minutes, she polished off a second steak meal.

cowboy hat to bet on who could eat the most one-pound steaks. The winner chomped through four-and-a-half of them (hence the 72 ounces), a shrimp cocktail, and a bread roll.

Throw in a salad and a baked potato, and that's pretty much the same meal that confronted me the day I sauntered into The Big Texan, a bright yellow, Old West-themed complex on Interstate 40.

Challenge-eaters are seated at an elevated dais in front of the steak grill. Overhead, an electronic ticker counts down the 60-minute time limit. A beefy man from North Carolina was taking his curtain call as I prepared to make my entrance. The triumphant southeasterner radiated a certain post-prandial glow and looked about four-and-a-half pounds above his fighting weight of 295.

I sidled up to the stage, swinging a bottle of Maalox at my side like a cowboy swinging a bottle of hooch on payday. The duded-up waiter set the steak down in front of me; the plate landed with a thud, like a saddlebag of gold on a poker table.

It's amazing how hard you can make a simple act just by thinking about it. After a flying start, I was soon masticating every morsel obsessively. I had only eaten about a third of the steak in the first 35 minutes. I got most of the sides down, but I was over-thinking my meal.

"You hit the wall," Lee said. "I've seen it before: that shade of green, that little sweat on your forehead, that pain in your jaws."

In the dying seconds, I lifted up the remaining half of the steak and bit into the side of it. The buzzer sounded. The crowd applauded. I poured a cowboy-boot shaped pitcher of water over my head.

In hindsight, I maintain that my stomach had adequate room. It was my technique and my psychology that let me down. "Mind over matter," a Richard Wiggan wrote on the "Words of Wisdom" board reserved for those who conquer the challenge. Next time, maybe I'll make the board. For now, I'll have to settle for being half-Texan. ★

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text by **Randy Mallory**



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903/593-0311; www.stanleysfamous.com.

WHEN OUT-OF-TOWN GUESTS VISIT me in Tyler, and their mouths water for barbecue, my choice, hands down, is Stanley's Famous Pit Bar-B-Q. The half-century-old eatery has grown into one of the Rose City's hottest go-to dining destinations. The joint dishes up a tasteful blend of smoked meats, old-fashioned tradition, and live roots music—plus a slogan I can feel good about: “Be Kind. Have Fun.”

National praise over the last few years has vaulted Stanley's into the holy-smoke pantheon of Texas barbecue joints, but my love affair with Stanley's dates back to the 1960s, around the time that J.D. Stanley took over a 1940s barbecue shack and added a red-and-green neon sign proclaiming “Stanley's Famous Pit Bar-B-Q.” (The City of Tyler Preservation Board recently designated the sign a historic landmark, the first



MAKE IT!

Home BBQ tips
at texashighways.com/eat.

sign so honored.) I still recall pushing open the restaurant's screen door with my dad, who worked a short walk away as a barber. We'd order chopped-beef sandwiches served on butcher paper and sit side-by-side in one-piece school desks, at the time the only seating. We'd pour on the spicy sauce and eat lunch in smoky bliss, surrounded by knotty-pine walls and sawdust on the concrete floor to soak up wayward drippings.

The sawdust and school desks are gone, but folks still queue up at the original yellow laminate counter, surrounded by those same knotty-pine walls, to get smoky meats served on butcher paper. Stanley's even serves barbecue for breakfast: Giant burritos are top sellers—large flour tortillas stuffed with scrambled eggs, cheddar cheese, and a choice of meats. My favorite day-starter is J.D.'s Breakfast Bowl—a large bowl layered with scrambled eggs, pan-fried red potatoes, cheddar cheese, and choice of meats.

And what a choice of meats it is! The array includes chopped or sliced brisket rimmed with ample bark (that crunchy, peppery, fatty edge that gives brisket its mouthwatering flavor), savory pork sausage, pulled pork, and spicy turkey breast, plus prize-winning baby back pork ribs, which are rubbed twice with 11 spices and cooked slowly for hours—as are the other meats—in the low-heat smoke of pecan wood.

For lunch, I tend to revisit childhood memories with a toasted bun piled high with chopped brisket on which I splay dill pickles, sliced onions, and squirts of sweet-spicy sauce, still made according to J.D.'s handwritten recipe. Sometimes I pick the long-standing signature sandwich, the Shrove, named for the pre-Lenten day of indulgence most of us know as Fat Tuesday. This pile-up of brisket, ham, and cheese (indeed, barbecue and cheese go well together) has a descendant sandwich called the Brother-in-Law

that substitutes a sausage link for ham. I've yet to try Stanley's most outrageous new sandwich, the audaciously dubbed Mother Clucker, which puts smoked chicken thigh, fried egg, cheddar cheese, spicy mayo, candied bacon, and guacamole (on request) between slices of jalapeño-cheese sourdough bun.

For dinner I often go whole hog with a mixed-meat plate of pork ribs, brisket, and sausage complemented with sides of fresh-made cole slaw, potato salad, and cowboy beans. The meats are so well seasoned that sauce is purely optional. Stanley's boasts a full bar, so I grab a cold Texas beer and enjoy my meal on the open-air, covered patio, hopefully on a night featuring live music. (Fridays offer touring acts playing music from Latin funk and blues to Texas roots and reggae.)

Stanley's remains the city's oldest mom-and-pop restaurant. These days, the mom and pop are Jen and Nick Pencis, who have their own love affair with Stanley's. That's where they first met and where Nick proposed marriage. The thirty-something couple took over the eatery in 2006 determined to blend a half-century tradition with first-class service, creative new offerings, and live music. To keep up with demand, they boosted seating capacity to 150 and turn out 30-40 briskets, 60 racks of ribs, and eight or more pork butts daily. Even still, they almost always run out of something.

Over the years, I have known no one who eats at Stanley's more often than my longtime friend and local historian James Wilkins. Forget award-winning ribs and funky sandwiches; James orders turkey. "The seasoning and smokiness give it an indescribable taste," he says. "Stanley's is such a quirky place, they should call it 'quirky turkey.'"

To James and to me, there's something special about Stanley's. The place goes way back. It's full of smoke and history and love. "Nick and Jen work hard to create a unique eating experience that really honors what's gone on before," James adds. "That's my idea of a true Texas success story." ★



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Next Weekend

WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR FUN?

Water, Water Everywhere

KICKING BACK AT CANYON LAKE

text by MICHELLE BURGESS



KAYAK CANYON

A Canyon Lake weekend might include a half-day kayaking adventure on the lower Guadalupe River, which flows clear and cold from a dam built in the 1960s.

IT IS NEARLY DUSK ON THE LOWER GUADALUPE, one of those incomparable evenings when skies are clear, humidity is low and the only insects in sight are lightning bugs. The river is low and has been since the drought came along in '05, and maybe that contributes to the blessed dearth of mosquitoes. But water flows deep enough for the handful of fly fishermen who have spread out along this stretch to get a hit every 20 minutes or so. They aren't speaking—it's not even clear if they're together—and are too far away for me to hear the zzz-zzz-whoosh as they rhythmically cast their lines over and over. I can hear the burbling Guadalupe itself, but just barely.

Instead, the voice of Ernest Tubb floats over from the deck of

Canyon Lake getaways can be as luxurious or as laid-back as you'd like; dozens of accommodations run the gamut from rustic cabins to plush resorts.

the next house, where a couple in their 40s or 50s offers up a mirror image of me—feet up, drinks in hand, faces turned to the lolling, gray-green Guadalupe. Our playlists complement each other, and we have fallen into a mutually satisfying unspoken agreement over the past couple of days: their Patsy Cline and Buck Owens and Dale Watson at cocktail hour, my Pat Green and Robison brothers and Turnpike Troubadours when the sun goes down.

The beauty of a Canyon Lake va-

The
DISTANCE
to CANYON
LAKE



San Antonio
42 miles;
1 hour

San Angelo
203 miles;
3.25 hours

Houston
190 miles;
3 hours

Fort Worth
245 miles;
3.75 hours

Laredo
197 miles;
3 hours



BAJA MOMENT

Outdoor seating at Baja BBQ Shack, a casual restaurant on the north shore of Canyon Lake, affords broad views of the water and cool breezes.

cation is in moments like these, and in those that are decidedly busier. As the self-proclaimed “Water Recreation Capital of Texas,” the area offers plenty of action—extreme or less so—for both boat owners and those whose only accoutrements are a swimsuit and towel. Situated about 18 miles northwest of New Braunfels and an hour from downtown San Antonio, the reservoir and community surrounding it also provide an ideal home base for further exploration of the Hill Country.

Canyon Lake getaways can be as luxurious or as laid-back as you'd like; dozens of accommodations run the gamut from rustic cabins to plush resorts. We're staying at Treehouse Lodge, a multi-decked structure that can comfortably accommodate up to 24 and whose eight-story tower peeks over the treetops and is visible from the road across the river. For about \$925 per day, you get the whole kit and caboodle, making it ideal for a family reunion or group retreat. It is less than 15 minutes from the lake and about the same distance to Gruene. Grand in size and views, the lodge also features a full kitchen, a gas grill, and shelves full of DVDs and books.

From the front, the vacation rentals neighboring ours appear to be mostly Mid-Century ranch homes with scrubby yards and mismatched fences. But from the back their true glory is revealed. Sprawling decks support hammocks, barbecue grills, and well-worn patio furniture. Yards slope down to the water, where square wooden docks accommodate porch swings and Adirondack chairs. Low fences separate neighbor from neighbor but are only a few feet high so as not to block anyone's view of the river. You're close enough to get to know one another if you'd like, but far enough away to easily leave it at a friendly wave instead.

I've earned my time on the deck, and my beer. Because while my crew—my 22-year-old daughter, Hillary, and a gaggle of her friends—is more than OK with the unpretentious

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 BRADY, TEXAS




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Airborne with Texas Flyboard Rentals

CANYON LAKE

Canyon Lake, created in 1964 by impounding a section of the Guadalupe River, lies in northern Comal County. For information on lodging, restaurants, and activities, contact the **Canyon Lake Chamber of Commerce**, 800/528-2104; www.canyonlakechamber.com.

The **Treehouse Lodge**, on the Guadalupe River at the Ponderosa Crossing, sleeps up to 24 people. Call 800/385-4013; www.drumresorts.com.

Baja BBQ Shack, on the north shore of Canyon Lake at 280 Marina, opens daily for lunch and dinner; frequent live music. Call 830/935-3122; www.bajabbqshack.com.

Texas Flyboard Rentals offers guided flyboarding sessions starting at \$125 for instruction and 30 minutes of exhilarating flying time. Riders must be at least 14 years old (18 if a parent or guardian isn't present). Call 210/887-2630; www.texasflyboardrentals.com.

Gruene River Company, at 1404 Gruene Rd. in Gruene, rents inflatable tubes, two-person rafts, and kayaks; the company offers put-in and pickup service. Call 830/625-2800; www.gruenerivercompany.com.

accommodations, there's only so much sitting still that they can handle. Yesterday, they tried flyboarding with Texas Flyboard Rentals, a husband-and-wife-owned business that is one of only a few such operations in Texas. It's an exhilarating adrenaline surge of a sport for the brave of heart and strong of body; propelled into the air by powerful blasts of water, most people soar between 10 and 25 feet above the lake.

Dinner was at Baja BBQ Shack, a favorite for live music and moderately priced appetizers (like brisket queso), burgers, barbecue, and seafood, plus a lively outdoor bar with potent "Tex-aritas," bacon-spiked bloody marys, and a fine view of the lake. Outside, it's no shoes, no shirt, no problem—and



As the self-proclaimed “Water Recreation Capital of Texas,” the area offers plenty of action—extreme or less so—for both boat owners and those whose only accoutrements are a swimsuit and towel.

topper to an amazing weekend that saw the oldest of my offspring graduate from the University of Texas. Our trip feels a lot like summer camp, with its easy rhythm and mix of physical activity and downtime.

We follow a flexible schedule, but each evening finds wet swimsuits hanging in the showers, and water-logged tennis and boat shoes tossed haphazardly around the deck and rustic living room. Despite frequent sunscreen applications, all of us have pink noses and cheekbones and random patches of skin we couldn't quite reach. When we fall into bed at night, we sleep hard.

The novelty of flyboarding notwithstanding, the trip has an undeniable old-fashioned quality. There is wi-fi, but phones do not become a distraction. Instead, board games are played, books are read, Shiner is consumed, crazy dances are created. It's a different experience than what I would have had just a few



FIND MORE ONLINE

More fun at Canyon Lake at texashighways.com/nextweekend.

years ago, when I had three teenagers, or a decade ago, when they were all in elementary school. I can't say I miss the anxiety that naturally comes from being a mother on vacation with young kids. Just as I've earned my respite on the deck, I think I've earned a quickie vacation where the only person I have to fend for is myself.

In a week, Hillary will be at work full-time and her friends scattered across the country for jobs or internships, or enjoying a final couple of months before starting grad school. But for a few days, they've gotten to take a time-out from responsibilities, something we all need every once in awhile. Their sunburns will fade, but I hope the memory of how it feels to step away from real life for a few days will stick with them.

I know it will for me. ★

as the evening progresses, no strangers.

Today we spent the afternoon kayaking the Guadalupe with boats from Gruene River Company, where you can rent inflatable tubes, two-person rafts, or solo kayaks and select a trip of two to six hours. While not as heart-pumping as flyboarding, our group (OK, just me) took a few tumbles into the water. The minimum age is 6—4-year-olds are allowed on some milder trips—and recommendations include sunscreen, shoes, and a waterproof camera; after our experience, I can see why. But while I may be exhausted, I'm the only one who's currently awake—and it's only 8 o'clock. They'll be getting their second wind about the time I'm ready to turn in.

For us, the brief respite is the perfect

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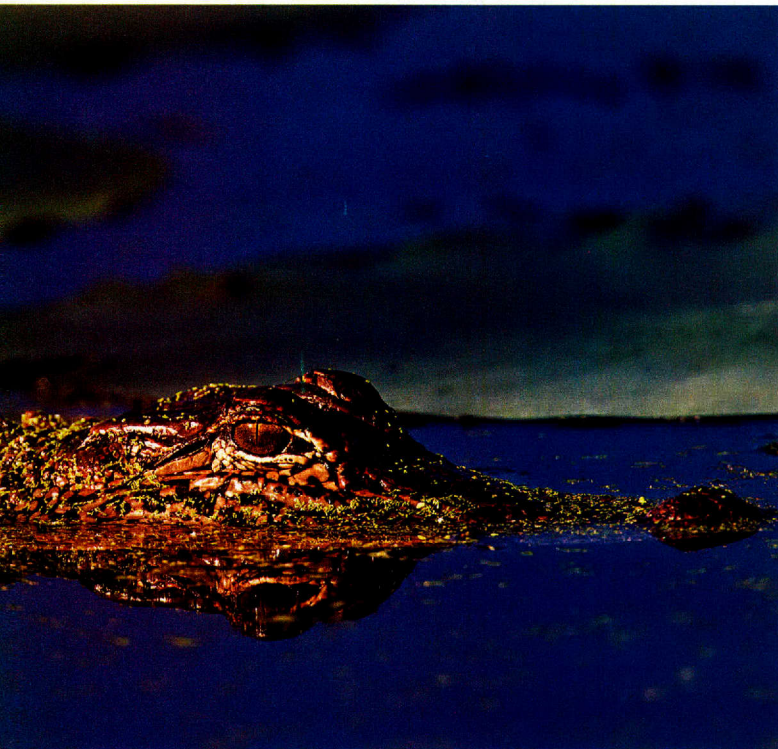
Closing In on the Top 10

Small towns and the great outdoors—perennially popular topics with *TH* readers and well-represented in this year's Texas Top 40 countdown. To date, the compilation of favorites has included lively towns like Glen Rose, Marfa, and Ben Wheeler, and the scenic splendor of Caddo Lake, Garner State Park, and Padre Island.

The appeal of simple escapes remains strong as we close in on the Top 10 this month. Coming in at No. 12, Brazos Bend State Park, southwest of Houston, offers trails for hiking, biking, and horseback-riding, six lakes, and stellar events at the George Observatory. In the Northeast Texas town of Mount Pleasant,

No. 11 on the list, voters noted the downtown eateries and shops (selling cheesecakes and antiques), performing arts, and rodeos. And our readers' No. 10 pick, the Panhandle's Palo Duro Canyon, earned praise for its scenic trails, *TEXAS* outdoor summer musical, and unmatched beauty.

The 2014 Texas Top 40 Countdown will continue each month until December, when we will reveal our readers' top destination in the state. Thanks to the thousands of you who chimed in with your favorites. It's been a fun ride so far—where will you take us next? ↓



BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK

Less than an hour southwest of Houston, the hardwood forests and alligator-rich waterways of Brazos Bend State Park create a welcome respite from big-city hustle and bustle. Popular activities here include hiking, biking, and fishing in the park's six lakes. (When you spy the abundant gators, you'll understand why the park doesn't allow swimming.) On Saturdays from 3-10 p.m., visitors can explore the skies (and stars!) at the park's George Observatory—a satellite of the Houston Museum of Natural Science—which maintains three domed telescopes.

MORE INFO
 Contact Brazos Bend State Park at 979/553-5102; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/brazos-bend.

"DEFINITELY BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK! THIS PLACE IS AWESOME, WITH MILES OF WELL-MAINTAINED HIKING AND BIKING TRAILS, NICE CAMPSITES AND FACILITIES, GREAT NATURE CENTER, AND LOTS OF BIRDS AND OTHER WILD-LIFE ... ESPECIALLY ALLIGATORS!" —REBECCA SYKES, MANVEL

- 40 LUBBOCK
- 39 MARBLE FALLS
- 38 BASTROP
- 37 CADDO LAKE STATE PARK
- 36 HOUSTON
- 35 GLEN ROSE
- 34 AMARILLO
- 33 MARFA
- 32 DALHART
- 31 DALLAS/FORT WORTH
- 30 GARNER STATE PARK
- 29 LOCHART
- 28 ROSSMOUNT
- 27 LAKE FORD
- 26 LAKE FORD
- 25 AUSTIN
- 24 GRANBURY
- 23 FORT ARKANSAS
- 22 KERRVILLE
- 21 FORT CHADBOURNE
- 20 BEN WHEELER
- 19 ALPINE/FORT DAVIS
- 18 PADRE ISLAND
- 17 ABILENE
- 16 MCKINNEY
- 15 CANYON
- 14 GALVESTON
- 13 PALESTINE
- 12 GURRUS CHRISTI
- 11 BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK
- 10 MOUNT PLEASANT
- 9 PALO DURO CANYON
- 8
- 7
- 6
- 5
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- 3
- 2
- 1



PALO DURO CANYON

Palo Duro Canyon has been wowing people for at least 12,000 years, when natives found shelter within this rugged chasm in the southern high plains. Measuring 120 miles long, 20 miles wide, and 800 feet deep, Palo Duro dazzles visitors with rocky shades of pink, lavender, and orange, along with geologic formations like the aptly named Lighthouse. Palo Duro Canyon State Park provides public access for hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping, and observing the rare scenery. During the summer, the park hosts the outdoor musical drama *TEXAS*, a lively telling of regional history set against the backdrop of a 600-foot cliff.

MORE INFO

Contact Palo Duro Canyon State Park, 806/488-2227; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/palo-duro-canyon.

"THE CANYON IS GORGEOUS, AND THERE ARE SO MANY OTHER THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA—ELKINS RANCH JEEP TOURS, PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL MUSEUM, AMARILLO ... BUT THE CANYON ITSELF IS MY PICK."

—DIANE TERRY, BRADY

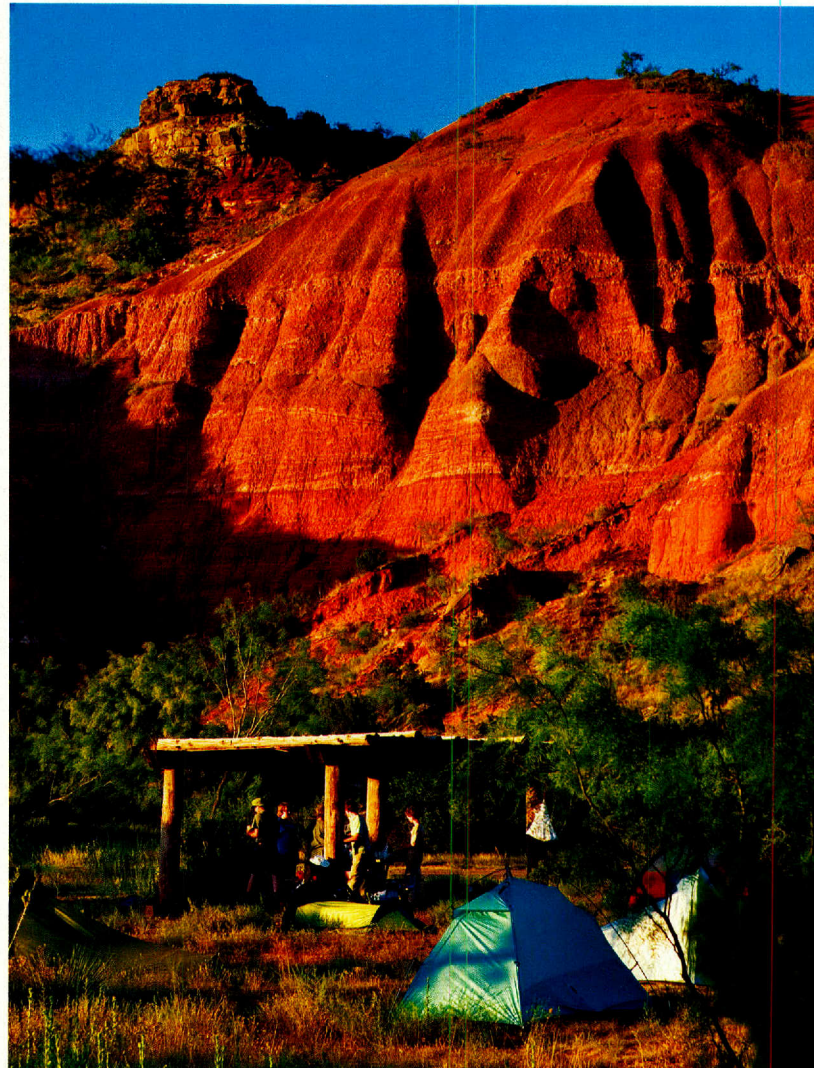


MOUNT PLEASANT

What's not to like about a place called Mount Pleasant? Votes poured in for the Northeast Texas town, with special mentions of the historic downtown square and its specialty shops, including Laura's Cheesecake & Bakery. Among other "Pleasantries," the town boasts year-round events, from rodeos to shows at the Whatley Center for the Performing Arts, a historical museum with Caddo and pioneer artifacts, chocolate factory tours, a bluebird trail, and the allure of area parks and lakes.


"MOUNT PLEASANT IS A PLACE THAT IS 'EVERYTHING TEXAS'—FRIENDLY FOLKS, GREAT FOOD, ACCESS TO NEARBY LAKES, THE HISTORIC DOWNTOWN, THE WHATLEY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, AND THE HEART'S BLUFF GAME RANCH."

—MARTIN BELL, CHAPPELL HILL





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POSSUM KINGDOM *REBORN*

A new light shines on this North Texas reservoir

Text by JUNE NAYLOR

Photographs by WILL VAN OVERBEEK

*A nearby cliff island and this 85-foot limestone formation together
create Possum Kingdom Lake's legendary "Hell's Gate."*

WINDING
AROUND
A CURVE
ON PARK ROAD
36 ON THE
WAY TO THE
EASTERN
SHORES
OF POSSUM
KINGDOM
LAKE,

I breathe a sigh of relief. A ridge high on the horizon ahead of me presents a much healthier visage than the one I beheld on my last trip to the lake, which has been a weekend retreat since childhood.

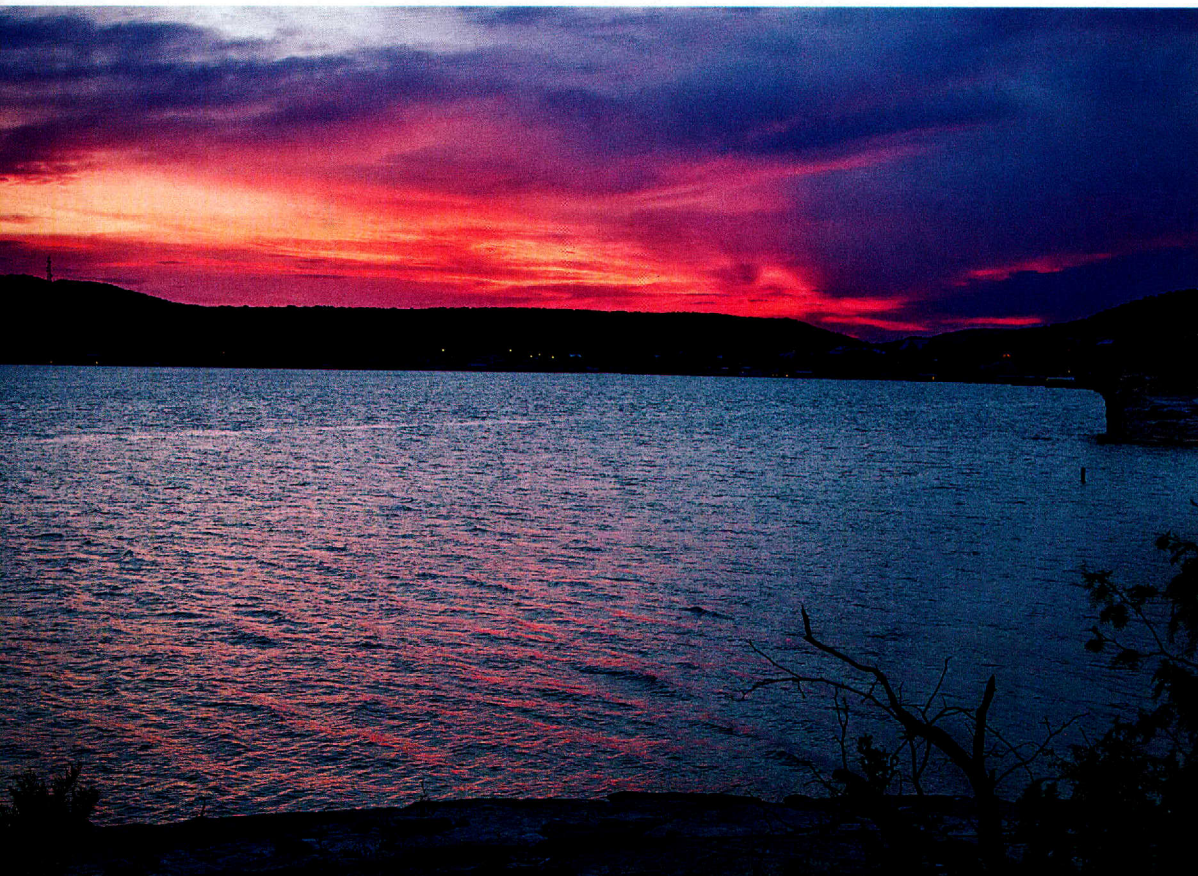
In 2011, devastating fires ravaged significant areas around the beloved 16,000-plus-acre Brazos River reservoir, in Palo Pinto County some 90 minutes west of Fort Worth.

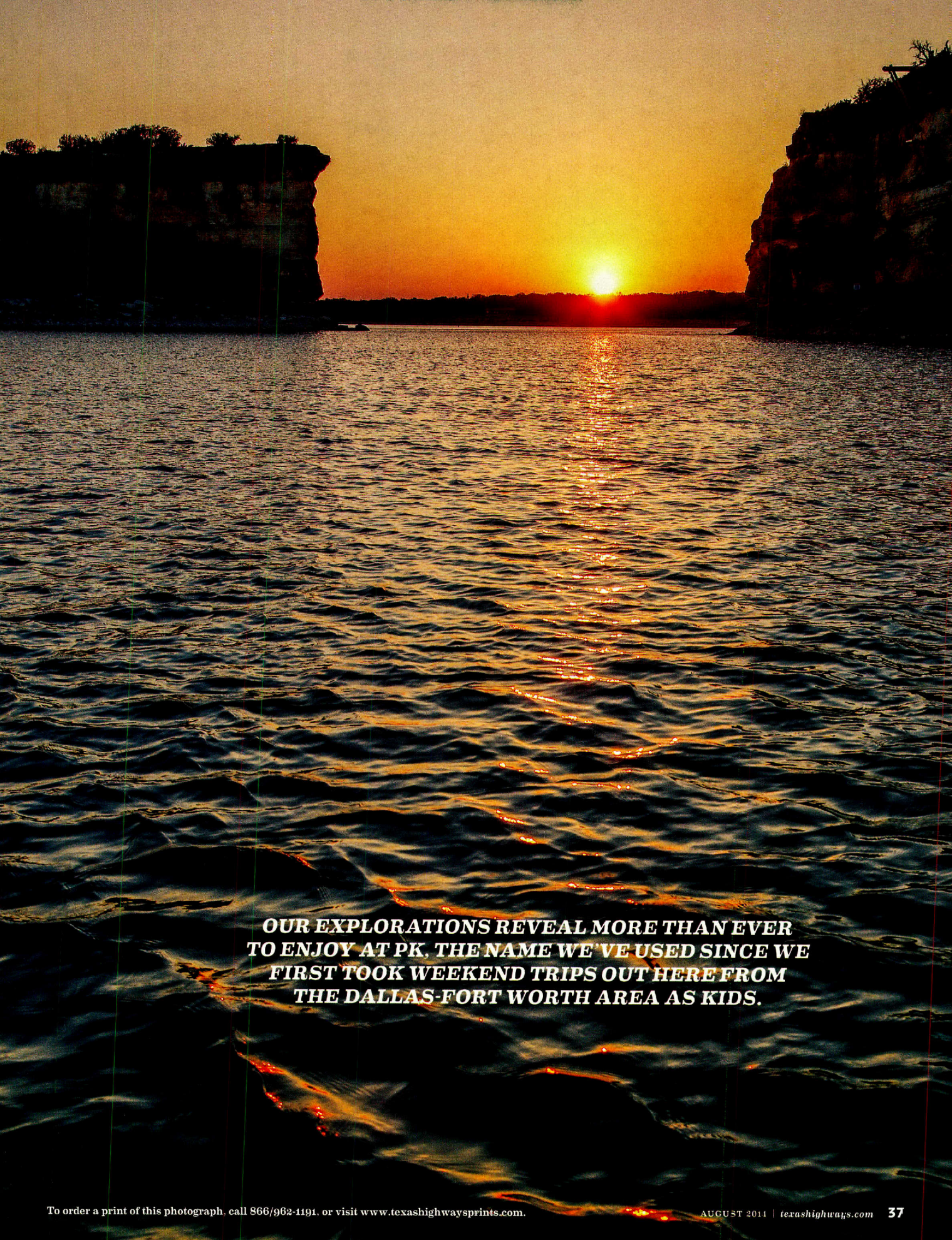
But three years after the fires, that same ridge exudes hope in the form of young, healthy growth—in spite of an ongoing drought. What's more, robust rebuilding and impressive expansion erase all signs of the fires, meaning a reborn Possum Kingdom Lake awaits my family on this trip.

Our explorations reveal more than ever to enjoy at PK, the name we've used since we first took weekend trips out here from the Dallas-Fort Worth area as kids. Here's where we're spending time on our favorite Palo Pinto escape today.

LAKE ESCAPE

Left: The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake features a lake-side inn and restaurant, along with splendid PK panoramas. Right: The Hell's Gate formation drew thousands of spectators for the recent Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series.





**OUR EXPLORATIONS REVEAL MORE THAN EVER
TO ENJOY AT PK, THE NAME WE'VE USED SINCE WE
FIRST TOOK WEEKEND TRIPS OUT HERE FROM
THE DALLAS-FORT WORTH AREA AS KIDS.**



OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

We find the canoe livery in busy operation at the Possum Kingdom State Park store, where we buy walking sticks to help us navigate our way on the rocky, twisting paths that wind through verdant sections of untouched woods. We pick up picnic provisions, as well, as the store stocks plentiful supplies for folks renting the park's renovated cabins (we particularly like the ones with rocking chairs on the porches) and for anyone heading out on fishing expeditions.

While inside the store, the clerk explains the prevailing legend about the lake's name: More than a century ago, pioneers discussing various traders in the region would joke about one in particular who dealt in possum pelts from this part of the Brazos River. He was referred to as the one who brought furs from his "possum kingdom." Thus informed,

LAND AND LAKESHORE

Above: On the lake's western shores, Possum Kingdom State Park has renovated cabins, waterfront campsites, and some three miles of wooded trails. Right: Sandy Beach park lies on the scenic western tip of the PK peninsula.

we head to the hiking loop that courses through the primitive camping area, climbing ridges for spectacular views and wandering into the shallow waters to marvel at massive tumbleweeds that came to rest at the lake's edge.

Another sunny day, we find ourselves on the east side of the lake, exploring the peninsula bisected by Farm Road 2951. Friends who keep vacation homes on this corner of the lake point us to the hiking and bicycling trails here—a 16-mile system with 12 trailheads—which the Brazos River Authority maintains. We easily spend a day wandering along Colonels Row, Burma Road, and Redbird Road, all stemming away from FM 2951, to explore trails leading to scenic lookouts called Arrowhead Point, Horned Frog Lookout, and Angel View.

Every picnic, cookout, beach toy, and sunblock necessity for our day on the peninsula awaits us at The Trading Post, a terrific little grocery and supply store on Park Road 36. These provisions prove invaluable for picnicking and splashing along the lakeshore at our two favorite parks on the peninsula, North D&D, on the east end, and Sandy Beach, at the peninsula's western tip.

EATING, SLEEPING, LUXURIATING LAKESIDE

A stone's throw from The Trading Post, The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake grew from a small marina to an impressive high-end neighborhood over the past decade or so. Though it's lined with expensive homes, we discover the Harbor a delightful place for visitors to hang out for a few days, too.

Executive Chef Steve Mitchell leads us through the large stone archway from The Grille, The Harbor's restaurant, to its waterside patio, laughing when we gasp at the view. "Everyone from the city walks out and exclaims, 'Look at the water! The water!'" In nice weather, there's not a better spot imaginable for enjoying goodies from the new pizza oven, as well as bacon-wrapped prawns and bone-in ribeye with grilled peppers and onions, with corn polenta alongside.

We stay in The Inn, positioned about 100 yards from The Grille, where we sit on the porch in rockers and listen to the waves lap at the rocks. Decorated in a fancy ranch theme, with heavy, rustic wood furnishings and wrought-iron accents, our room provides a perfect rest after a day of play on the lake. We can stay in, but we'd miss The Harbor fun, which includes



**OUR TWO FAVORITE PARKS
ON THE PENINSULA,
NORTH D&D ON THE EAST END,
AND SANDY BEACH AT
THE PENINSULA'S WESTERN TIP,
ARE PARTICULARLY INVITING
FOR PICNICKING AND SPLASHING
ALONG THE LAKESHORE.**

one-hour boat tours (seeing the PK rock formation called Hell's Gate is a must) and hayrides.

About 10 minutes or so south of us along Texas 16, The Cliffs is another upscale residential area that welcomes vacationing guests. We wander over one evening to Spurs, a convivial sort of "19th hole" bar that's popular with golfers staying at the resort. Grazing on appetizers, such as Texas Toothpicks—a basket of fried jalapeño slices and onion strings—we find we're tempted by the dinner menu from the adjacent Chaparral Grille. The accommodating staff happily serves us the specialty without our having to change venues, a meatloaf bringing together ground steak, venison cutlets, and pork tenderloin, as well as a Cajun crawfish pasta dish.

The Cliffs' accommodations include comfortable rooms in a hotel-style inn as well as private villas; the latter consist of condos of all sizes. A full-service spa sits a few steps from the inn, while The Cliffs' popular golf course unfolds to reveal stunning views of the lake. The Cliffs Marina offers a number of watercraft rentals, as well.

Our wanderings turn up other good eating and sleeping options away from the resorts. At Boondocks, a friendly bar and grill with local live music, we indulge in sensational green chile-bacon cheeseburgers. At the Hide-Away, near The Trading Post, we find 22 modern cabins and a 16-room inn with lake views.

Even better, the Hide-Away sits in quick reach of those Brazos River Authority hike-and-bike paths. We find that such easy access to mesquite-shaded trails makes early-morning and late-afternoon exploration the best way to see PK in a new light. ★

Fort Worth writer June Naylor yearns for a quick escape to canoe and hike at Possum Kingdom State Park. TH photographer Will van Overbeek enjoyed the state park store: "The proprietor is full of local knowledge, and you can buy all of your lake supplies and even a postcard picturing a baby opossum."

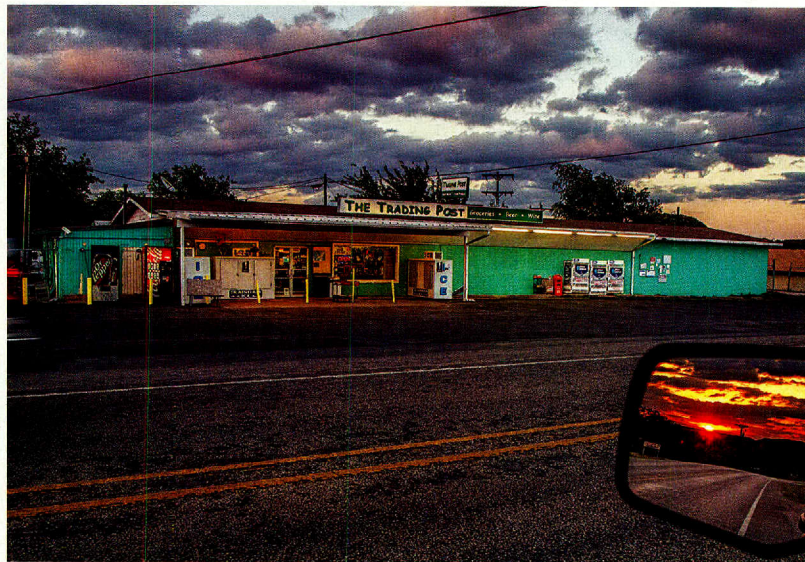
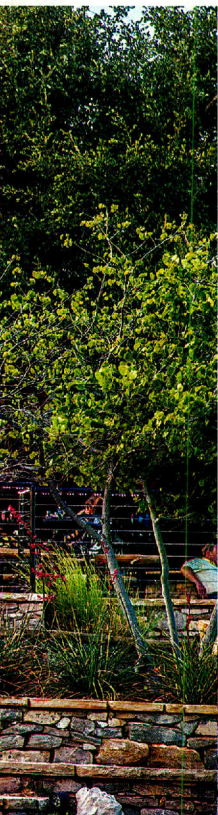


PK AWAY!

Above and right: PK pleasures include the water-side patio and porch rockers at The Grille at The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake.

Facing page: The Trading Post grocery carries all the necessities for a day of play on the peninsula. Head to Boondocks PK Bar & Grill for live music, pool and shuffleboard, and a mean green chile-bacon cheeseburger.





ESSENTIALS POSSUM KINGDOM LAKE

For area information, contact the Possum Kingdom Chamber of Commerce at 940/779-2424 or 888/779-8330; www.possumkingdomlake.com. Also check out the Brazos River Authority's website, www.brazos.org. Both websites include a map of the Brazos River Authority's hiking and biking trails. Following are sites mentioned in the story.

Possum Kingdom State Park, Park Rd. 33, Caddo, 940/549-1803; www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

The Trading Post, 1712 Park Rd. 36, Graford, 940/779-2543; www.pktradingpost.com.

The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake, 1693 Park Rd. 36, Graford; 940/779-3600; www.harborliving.com. Inquire about horseback programs and other amenities.

The Grille at The Harbor on Possum Kingdom Lake, 3415 Scenic Point Dr., Graford, 940/779-7600; www.harborliving.com.

The Cliffs Resort, 160 Cliffs Dr., Graford, 940/779-4040; www.thecliffsresort.com. Inquire about the marina, golf course, dining, lodging, and private villa rentals.

Boondocks PK Bar & Grill, 501 N. FM 2353, Graford, 940/779-2200; www.boondockspk.com.

The Hide-Away Inn, Park Rd. 36 at FM 2951 (cabins at 1782 FM 2951), Graford, 940/779-2333; www.pkhideaway.com.





The Garden of
yes

To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.



THE LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER
CENTER'S NEW **FAMILY GARDEN**

text by Andrea Abel / *photographs by* J. Griffis Smith



Luci Johnson, the youngest daughter of President Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson, admits that her love of nature came later in life, despite her mother's devotion to protecting and restoring native plants. But, thanks to Lady Bird's gentle persistence, an enthusiasm for the natural world eventually rubbed off. That's one of the reasons Luci speaks with such passion about the new Luci and Ian Family Garden at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. Opened in May and named for Luci and her husband, Ian Turpin, the garden's lead donors, the center's elaborate, 4.5-acre addition intends to change the way children and their families approach play.

"Growing up, I wasn't thoroughly *disinterested* in nature, but I didn't bask as early as I wish I had. That's one of the reasons that I'm so excited about this garden at the Wildflower Center," says Johnson, who says she's grateful to have shared her appreciation for the natural world with her mother before her death in 2007. The new addition to the Wildflower Center strives to stir an experiential sense of wonder and fun, unlocking the child in all of us. Among the activities in store: Come prepared to climb on artfully arranged tree trunks, hand-pump water into a limestone watering hole, and run barefoot with abandon on the Play Lawn.

CHILDLIKE WONDERS

Designed to encourage hands-on play, the new Family Garden features multiple opportunities to engage the senses, including touching (and smelling) flowers, dangling your toes in a pool that mimics Central Texas' aquifers, and making your way through a low, stone spiral.



LUCI AND IAN
FAMILY GARDEN



Kick off your sandals and sink your toes into the soft, grassy expanse of the new Play Lawn, where such activities as running, kite-flying, and ball-throwing are encouraged.



Johnson stresses that visitors do not need to have children in tow to experience the garden. “I wanted visitors to feel like they could come with or without a child. After all, mother used to say, ‘A day without learning is a day wasted.’ What better way to learn than through playing in nature?”

Thanks to video games, busy streets, and a never-ending slew of structured extracurricular activities, most kids these days don’t spend much time outdoors. Rare are days spent collecting acorns, building tree-branch forts, constructing mud waterways, and braiding daisy chains. And being in nature and *connecting* with nature are two different things. Too often, modern outdoors play has a “look-but-don’t-touch quality.” Wildflower Center Executive Director Susan Rieff noticed this when observing school groups and families at the center.

“When we first started the design process, our primary interest was to create a place where kids could be outdoors and explore nature on their own,” Rieff says. “We want kids out there getting wet—if they want to—and playing in the dirt. We want all these kids to grow up and be stewards of the earth.”

Award-winning landscape architect W. Gary Smith designed the garden for both unstructured and structured

hands-on play, and the Wildflower Center’s horticulturalists made sure the Family Garden has a decidedly native Texas twist. A palette of native Texas trees, shrubs, and flowers like red buckeye, *salvia greggii*, and Maximilian sunflowers lend an ever-changing mixture of color, texture, and scents throughout the year.

The Wildflower Center also emphasizes sustainable landscape design throughout, from the plants and building materials to resource conservation components such as rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation.

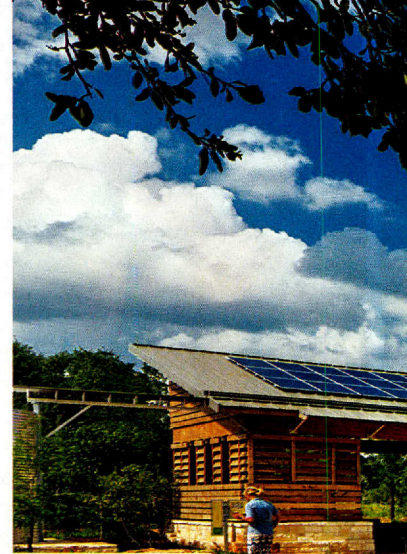
As you enter the Family Garden via a curved path and a short bridge made from recycled soda bottles, look for butterflies, bees, hummingbirds, and other pollinators flitting from blossom to blossom. Then consider kicking off your sandals and sinking your toes into the soft, grassy expanse of the new Play Lawn, where such activities as running, kite-flying, and ball-throwing are encouraged. Life-size



PLAYFUL NATURE

Human-scaled birds' nests made from grapevines (left) feature wooden "eggs."

Below and right, children scampering across a streambed may spy dinosaur tracks modeled after those found in the Paluxy riverbed in Glen Rose.



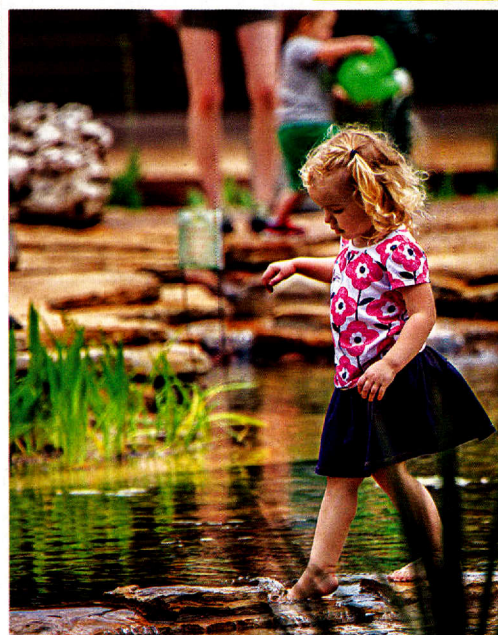
bronze sculptures of such savanna animals as jackrabbits and coyotes add whimsical touches, as does an assortment of all-weather exercise equipment—stationary bikes, elliptical trainers, and other contraptions that function on human power. This unusual touch was the idea of fitness devotee Luci Johnson, who saw similar equipment in British public parks and thought it would appeal to adults visiting the Family Garden.

Meandering the main pathway past the Play Lawn brings you to an attraction called the Metamorphosis Maze, featuring nine different species of shrubs native to Texas. All the hedges naturally stay low-growing, making it easier for parents to keep an eye on little ones. Based on mazes found in formal gardens throughout Europe, the maze illustrates the life cycle of a frog via Austin artist John Maisano's bronze sculptures, which kids are encouraged to climb. As you follow the maze, you can see a frog "develop" from egg to tadpole to adult. Grownups can climb on the sculptures, too, but can also learn which native shrubs make replacements for non-natives in home landscapes.

When the temperatures soar in the summertime, children and adults alike are drawn to swimming holes, and so for the new Family Garden, the Wildflower Center developed watering holes to mimic Central Texas' aquifer systems. Using a manual pump, visitors can pump water from a streambed, pour it on limestone boulders, and watch it seep down into tiny rivulets that feed a nearby pool. Be sure to look for

dinosaur tracks modeled after real dinosaur tracks found in the Paluxy River at Glen Rose. And yes, you can dangle your toes in the cool water, but be considerate of the fish and other creatures that call this pond home.

Nearby, the Family Garden's grotto replicates a



Texas Hill Country cave, complete with a waterfall that rewards pint-sized spelunkers with refreshing spray. Here, as with other spots in the garden, whimsical elements complement realism; the grotto's walls gleam with colorful tile mosaics, and spiky yuccas growing atop the grotto create a fanciful profile Dr. Seuss likely would have approved.

When you're ready for a break, the shady Robb Family Pavilion is the perfect spot to relax with a drink or snack. Outdoor programming also takes place at the Pavilion, creating a prime setting for concerts, workshops, classes, and the wildly popular summertime Nature Nights program, which explores topics such as snakes, wildlife tracking, fossils, and birds of prey.

Dozens of avian species make permanent and temporary homes at the Wildflower Center, and the Family Garden's new wildlife-viewing blind features a prime spot to try to spot them. A long wall of cedar interspersed with viewing portals, the blind overlooks a small pond surrounded by numerous feeders; in the late summer, you're likely to spy chickadees, mockingbirds, and cardinals.

Adjacent to the wildlife-viewing blind, a tangle of tree

ESSENTIALS

The Luci and Ian Family Garden is the newest addition to Austin's Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, at 4801 La Crosse Ave. Call 512/232-0100; www.wildflower.org.



trunks and artfully arranged cedar limbs invite climbing, swinging, and scrambling. Then, run over to an installation of three human-scaled birds' nests fashioned from woody mustang grapevines. Here, wooden eggs the size of watermelons inspire some creative kids to chirp and try to "hatch" them.

Since part of connecting with nature involves taking notice of details, the center included a tribute to spirals, which exist in many forms in the natural world. Nature's Spiral, a low stone spiral set with a colorful tile mosaic, showcases this phenomenon with depictions of a snail shell, Turk's cap blossoms, a snake, and agaves. The wall also teaches visitors about Fibonacci numbers, a pattern sometimes known as "nature's numbering system." Found in flower petals and seed heads, shells, and leaves, the Fibonacci sequence allows sunlight and other necessary elements to reach the entire organism.

Hopscotch games and a giant sandbox equipped with miniature shovels and buckets round out the formal attractions at the garden, but Rieff says the goal is to allow children's imaginations to run wild. "They'll make up things we never thought about," she says.

That's readily apparent on the Dry Creek Overlook, a footbridge that rises more than a story above a seasonal creek bed, where young boys were yelling "Tarzan!" during a recent visit.

Surrounded by native trees like bigtooth maple, lacey oak, and Eve's necklace, the overlook provides an overview of both the creekbed and the Family Garden's many enticements.

With a copious bounty of native Texas plants and aquatic, terrestrial, and aerial attractions, the Luci and Ian Family Garden is a destination that will lead people, no matter what their age, to new discoveries with every visit. "Mother used to say the joy of nature is the joy of being together and sharing it," Johnson says. ★

Austin-based writer Andrea Abel spent many childhood days counting spots on ladybugs, constructing mud waterways, and building secret forts beneath backyard shrubs. Photo Editor Griff Smith says he lost track of time taking images for this story. "It was so peaceful," he recalls, "and it was a lot of fun to watch the kids play."

The image features a vibrant red fabric, possibly a military sash or a decorative panel, adorned with a detailed gold embroidery of a laurel wreath. The wreath is composed of multiple branches of leaves, each meticulously stitched with fine, parallel lines to create a textured, three-dimensional effect. Small, circular gold studs are interspersed along the branches. To the left of the red fabric, several gold medals are arranged on a dark, almost black background. Each medal is circular and features a profile of a man's head, likely a historical figure, surrounded by inscriptions. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic sheen of the embroidery and the medals against the deep red and dark background.

An Inter



woven Legacy

~
THE GUERRA FAMILY
CULTIVATES NEW CULTURE
WITH DEEP ROOTS

TEXT BY **GENE FOWLER**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WILL VAN OVERBEEK**

Most Texans with deep roots in the state

treasure the contributions their ancestors made to its unique history. But there may not be a clan with a keener appreciation of its role in this immense and storied land than the Guerra family of far South Texas.

The first members of the Guerra family to step foot in the New World arrived from Spain in the early 1600s, landing in the Mexican port of Vera Cruz, which was then part of Nueva España. Several generations later, having established themselves in the colonial government, the Guerras acquired a land grant in the Rio Grande Valley. Here they colonized territories that would become part of Mexico and the United States, building communities and fostering a proud Texas legacy.

As caretakers of this 400-year-old legacy, the Guerras safeguard the history and culture of South Texas and share it with the world through a range of activities, including ranching, the arts, and the preservation of historical treasures. Enrique Guerra, the 85-year-old family patriarch, lives with his wife, Lydia, on San Vicente Ranch, part of the ancestral land grant near the Hidalgo County hamlet of Linn. Their forefathers arrived in the Rio Grande Valley in the mid-1700s, Guerra says, when José de Escandón established Nueva España's province of Nuevo Santander. "You have the famous saying of six flags in Texas," Guerra marvels. "We lived under all six flags."

An astute collector of Spanish Colonial, Mexican, and Southwestern art and antiques, Guerra shares selections from his collection in the Enrique and Lydia Guerra and Family Gallery at the Briscoe Western Art Museum in San Antonio. Enrique and Lydia's sons, Che and Kiko, extend the family's preservation of borderland culture elsewhere in South Texas. Che Guerra owns the Nuevo Santander Gallery and The Patio on Guerra restaurant in McAllen, while Enrique "Kiko" Guerra creates historically inspired paintings and sculpture in his San Vicente Ranch studio.

Steven M. Karr, former executive director of the Briscoe Western Art Museum, says the Guerras have amassed one of America's "great private collections" through generations of collecting art and artifacts on both sides of the border. "The family's collecting passion helps to tell the story of the region's shared history and traditions—Spanish, Mexican, the Republic, statehood," Karr says. "It embodies the often-changing political and social circumstances that continue to define the region today."

The Guerras track their more recent family history to Roma in Starr County, where ancestor Manuel Guerra settled in 1877. His two-story residence and store sits within the border town's National Historic Landmark district. Built by Heinrich Portscheller in 1884, the distinctive brick structure with its original wrought-iron balcony joins 37 other historic Roma sites to make up what the National Park Service deems "the only American Spanish colonial settlement that preserves the character of Escandón's town planning."

In 1908, while Enrique Guerra's grandfather Diodoro was Starr County sheriff, Enrique's father (also named Enrique) and his two brothers drove a herd of mules north to San Antonio, sold them, then headed for the brand-new town of McAllen. There, the brothers opened a store with the mule profits, managed land-clearing contracts, and sold the wood from uprooted mesquite trees for use as fuel in steamboats plying the Rio Grande. In 1912, their parents joined them, and a sign reading "D. Guerra and Sons 1912" went up on a brick building that still stands on 17th Street—also known as Guerra Street—in downtown McAllen. In 2008, Che Guerra, along with his cousin Arturo, restored an old saloon that Che's grandfather had opened in the historic building, expanded the structure in the same border-brick style, and opened The Patio on Guerra.

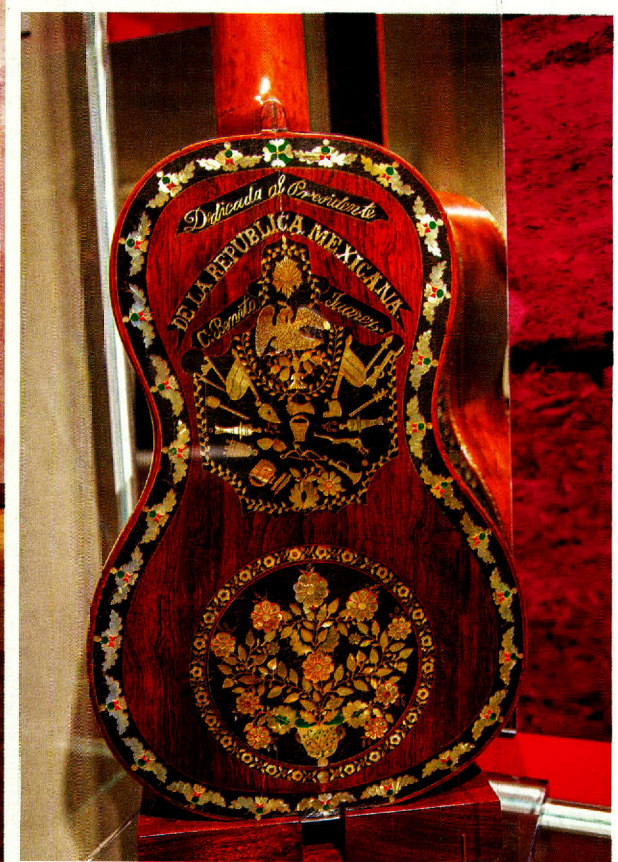
Che Guerra had caught preservation fever in the early 1980s, when he helped San Antonio businessman Larry Sheerin restore the LaBorde House in Rio Grande City

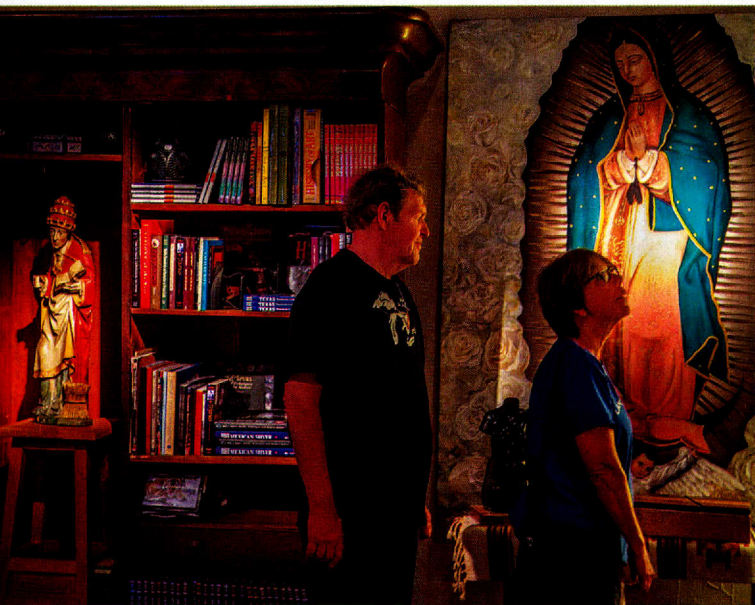


COLLECTING HISTORY

Previous spread: Guerra artifacts at the Briscoe Western Art Museum include a Mexican army general's uniform, ca. 1836, and Santa Anna's sword, 1852. This spread, from top: Saddles in the Briscoe's Enrique and Lydia Guerra and Family Gallery; a hand-crafted guitar from Mexico, ca. 1858; Che Guerra holds a Spanish oil-on-copper retablo at Nuevo Santander Gallery; and a Mexican Empire war drum, ca. 1823.







THE PATIO AND THE GALLERY

Top: Opened in 2008, *The Patio on Guerra in McAllen* offers a broad menu and a dining experience framed by art, music, and historic architecture. **Above:** *Nuevo Santander Gallery in McAllen*, including Martha Morales' oil-on-canvas *Virgen de Guadalupe con Rosas*.

and then managed the hotel for several years. He also opened an adjacent restaurant, Che's, that still bears his name (though today is under different ownership).

Collecting regional art and historic artifacts is a Guerra family devotion going back several generations, and Che got involved as a boy. With his wife, Becky, he decided to turn his passions for art and history into a business, opening McAllen's Nuevo Santander Gallery in 1998. The gallery's stone construction, bell tower, and stained-glass windows are reminiscent of a Spanish colonial mission. Antique wrought iron and 150-year-old wooden doors and windows from Mexico add to the effect. Local mesquite was used in interior floors, along with Talavera and Saltillo tile.

"We used regional caliche caprock stone for the exterior and the columns inside," says Che. "It's very hard, almost like marble. The three bells are for our three kids, and the blue line through the stained glass windows represents the Rio Grande. The middle window displays José Escandón's coat of arms."

Nuevo Santander Gallery's offerings are just as distinctive as its structure. Spanish Colonial, Mexican, and Old West antiques and artifacts share space with artworks that depict the lives and landscapes of the borderlands and beyond. Visitors can see Spanish Colonial religious paintings on copper, called *retablos*, which date to the 1650s. A large display case holds vintage frontier firearms, along with vintage spurs and ex-votos, which are votive offerings



to saints in the form of narrative artworks. A 1912 silk, silver, and gold processional banner from Mexico bears the embroidered image of Señora de los Remedios.

A large untitled oil painting by Kiko Guerra presents an intriguing vision of San Antonio's Mission Concepción, with *guitarristas* gathered around a campfire. Works by the Mexican artist Agapito Labios (1898-1996), who is best known for his paintings of children, testify to the enduring, transformative power of art. Jailed during the Mexican Revolution, Labios painted the walls of his prison cell. When local authorities saw his artistry, they commissioned Labios to paint more.

Sculpture in the gallery includes a small bronze model of Jason Scull's *Hijos del Sol*, which depicts 16th-Century Texas sojourner Cabeza de Vaca removing an arrow from a Native American's heart in a semi-miraculous medical procedure. A burgeoning McAllen arts district has grown around Nuevo Santander, as other galleries have been established nearby. The McAllen Chamber of Commerce named Becky Guerra its "Woman of the Year" in 2012 for initiating a popular First Friday Art Walk.

Aspects of the Guerras' gallery stretch about eight blocks south to their restaurant, The Patio on Guerra, where the art hanging on the vintage brick walls is also for sale. A lively yet refined crowd enjoys an extensive menu of entrées from range, wing, and sea, with both indoor and outdoor seating. Famed for its

Akita Bloody Mary and other cocktails, The Patio also hosts musical performers to complement the spirited ambiance. A selection of ancestral Guerra images hangs near the bar, along with a giclee print of a Kiko Guerra painting of *vaqueros* driving cattle past the Manuel Guerra store in Roma.

Back at the San Vicente Ranch, Kiko Guerra creates artwork that's often inspired by regional ranching history, such as a recent bronze sculpture of a Tejano drover training two steers how to travel in a cattle drive. "This is a scene from the early 1800s," he explains, shaping a small clay version. "They would rope wild cattle, then tie their heads together and braid their tails together to teach them how to go up the trail." A stickler for historical accuracy, the artist points out that these steers would have been bonier than their contemporary brethren. After casting, the piece will be placed within the next couple of years in the McNutt Courtyard and Sculpture Garden at the Briscoe Western Art Museum in San Antonio.

"I've been in the business of Longhorns for more than 50 years, and Kiko is the first artist who hits the mark in sculpting them. He grew up with them," says the elder Enrique Guerra. The proud father may be forgiven for his bias, but as a rancher dedicated to preserving the purity of the Longhorn breed and as president of the Cattlemen's Texas Longhorn Conservancy, Enrique Guerra knows his Longhorns.

He also knows collecting. Artifacts in the Guerra Gallery



Kiko Guerra is an accomplished cabrito cook. Taste kid goat barbecued by Kiko and other South Texas pitmasters on Nov. 1 at the Linn-San Manuel cookoff at La Muneca Ranch. See Kiko's cabrito recipe at texashighways.com/webertra.

in San Antonio's Briscoe museum include an exceptionally rare Comanchero jacket that provides a peek into a pioneer Southwestern subculture. Comancheros were mostly Hispanic traders who smuggled guns and ammunition to Comanches in exchange for mules, silver, and stolen goods. "The fringe on the jacket was the camouflage of that era," Enrique Guerra explains. "It would break the line of the wearer's body at a distance. It was a Comanche style to twist the fringe, but the velvet collar and embroidered sleeves were Spanish details."

A steel, gold, and leather sword on display was presented by Ames Manufacturing Co. of Massachusetts to Mexican President Santa Anna in 1852, presumably in hopes of winning an arms contract with the Mexican army. Several saddles

chronicle the evolution of horseback gear, from a rare 17th-Century silk-embroidered Spanish viceroy saddle with iron cross stirrups, to a Guerra family saddle with Mexican and American eagles crafted in silver. Other artifacts from the Guerra collection in the museum include three Mexican army general's uniforms from about 1836, as well as an 1823 wood, rope, and metal Mexican Empire war drum with the Mexican seal painted on its head and skulls around its shell.

In a short video playing in his namesake gallery, Enrique Guerra speaks of the sweep of history with the wisdom of one who has lived long and learned much from those who came before. "I can say that the Guerras are here to stay," he concludes, "and hopefully we'll be here a long, long time." ★

Austin-based freelance writer Gene Fowler was recently inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters. Texas Highways photographer Will van Overbeek says working with the Guerra family provided a fascinating look at Texas history, from Spanish frontier days to the present.



ESSENTIALS

THE GUERRA LEGACY

The Guerras' San Vicente Ranch is private, but travelers can learn more about the Guerra legacy and the history and culture of South Texas at other sites mentioned in the story:

The **Briscoe Western Art Museum** is at 210 W. Market St. in San Antonio. Call 210/299-4499; www.briscoemuseum.org.

Nuevo Santander Gallery is at 717 N. Main St. in McAllen. Call 956/618-4959; www.nuevosantander.com.

The Patio on Guerra is at 116 S. 17th Street in McAllen. Call 956/661-9100; www.patioonguerra.com.

The **Roma Historic District**, a National Historic Landmark, covers a 15-block area in central Roma. Call the City of Roma for more information, 956/849-1411.

E V E N T S

WANT MORE? GO TO THE EVENTS CALENDAR AT www.texashighways.com.

August's travel spotlights:



HILL COUNTRY > Brady Cabrito Calling

Not sure about grilled goat? Then head to Brady this Labor Day Weekend (August 29-30) for the World Championship BBQ Goat Cook-Off, now in its 41st year. More than 200 teams will gather in Richards Park to season and smoke the goat meat into a culinary masterpiece, competing for trophies, cash, and bragging rights. The Cook-Off also features art vendors, a street dance with the Cody Johnson Band, and the Goat Gallop, a 5K/10K fun run and walk—not to mention a healthy sense of humor. www.bradytx.com/pages/WorldChampionshipGoatCookOff1.

PANHANDLE PLAINS > Big Spring It's a Bird, It's a Plane!

Hang gliders will swarm the skies over Big Spring August 3-9 for a series of races hosted by the U.S. Hang Gliding & Paragliding Association. Weather permitting, the races start daily at 1 p.m. at McMahon-Wrinkle Airport, where planes tow the hang gliders to about 2,000 feet. The gliders ride thermal updrafts to altitudes as high as 10,000 feet, where they start the race to that day's goal, normally about 100 miles away. The airport provides bleachers for spectators (free entry) and pilots offer tandem hang-gliding flights (about \$100) in the morning and late afternoon. Call 432/264-2362.



GULF COAST > Houston Jewelry's Frontier

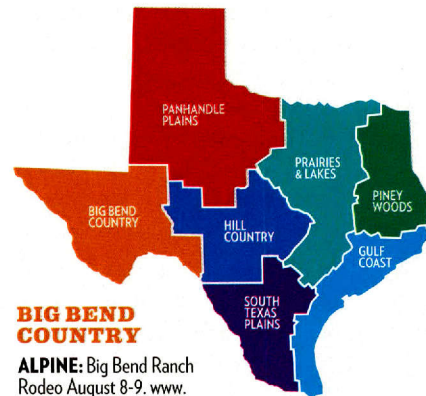
The landscape, culture, and political turbulence of the United States-Mexico border region take center stage in *La Frontera*, an exhibition of art jewelry at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. Houston jewelers join a group of 90 artists from around the world who crafted the 150 pieces of jewelry, such as necklaces, brooches, and bracelets, with materials ranging from silver and gold to canvas, polyester, porcelain, and water bottles. The exhibit runs through September 7. www.crafthouston.org.

PRAIRIES AND LAKES > Salado Salado Legends

Explore the history of the Central Texas town of Salado with the summer production of *Salado Legends*. A cast of volunteers puts on the annual outdoor musical drama at Tablerock Amphitheater with performances on July 19, July 26, and August 2. Now in its 22nd season, *Salado Legends* recounts the tale of Scottish settlers and Native Americans in the region in the mid-19th Century. The show starts at 8:15 p.m., but make a night out of the event by arriving early for the 7:15 fajita dinner. www.tablerock.org/index.html.



PHOTOS: (from top) © Wyatt McSpadden; courtesy Belinda Boulter; Nancy Moyer with Mark Clark. *Border Fence Series: Border Scenarios (Mexican View)*, 2013, reversible neck piece; courtesy Nancy Shepperd



BIG BEND COUNTRY

ALPINE: Big Bend Ranch Rodeo August 8-9. www.bigbendranchrodeo.com 432/364-2696

ALPINE: Big Bend Balloon Bash August 30-September 1. www.bigbendballoonbash.com 432/837-7486

EL PASO: Plaza Classic Film Festival August 7-17. www.plazaclassic.com

FORT DAVIS: Old Fort Day August 30. www.nps.gov/foda 432/426-3224

FORT DAVIS: Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival August 21-23. 432/426-3015

MARFA: Marfa Lights Festival August 30-September 1. www.marfacc.com 432/729-4942

ODESSA: West Texas Roundup August 1-3. www.electorcountycoliseum.com

ODESSA: Rock the Desert Music Festival August 7-9. www.rockthedesert.com 432/553-4420

TERLINGUA: Viva Terlingua Fest! August 14-17. www.viva-terlingua.com

GULF COAST

BEAUMONT: Family Arts Day at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas August 16. www.amset.org 409/832-3432

CORPUS CHRISTI: *Third Coast National Exhibit* August 1-September 19. www.kspacecontemporary.org

FREEPORT: Summertime Blues Fest August 29-30. www.freeportbluesfestival.com 979/233-3526

GALVESTON: BrewMaster Craft Beer Festival August 29-

31. www.brewmastersbeerfest.com

HOUSTON: *Got Gas?* August 1-January 20. www.cmhoustons.org 713/522-1138

HOUSTON: *Transcendent Deities of India: The Everyday Occurrence of the Divine* August 1-September 14. www.asiasociety.org/texas

HOUSTON: *Houston Penetrable* August 1-September 1. www.mfah.org

HOUSTON: *Alexander Archipenko: The Berlin Drawings* August 1-17. www.mfah.org

HOUSTON: *Magna Carta* August 1-17. www.hmns.org/magnacarta

HOUSTON: *Texas Masters Series: Sandie Zilker* August 1-September 7. www.crafthouston.org

MATAGORDA: Day on the Bay Wetland Kayak Trip August 9, 30. www.lcra.org/matagorda 800/776-5272

PALACIOS: Fish Fest Family Fishing Tournament August 9. www.palacioschamber.com 361/972-2615

PORT ARANSAS: Texas Legends Billfish Tournament August 6-10. www.txlegends.com 361/749-4870

PORT ARTHUR: *The Soul of Vietnam: A Portrait of the North* June 7-August 3. 409/982-7000

PORT ISABEL/SOUTH PADRE ISLAND: Texas International Fishing Tournament July 30-August 3. www.tifit.org 956/943-8438

PORT O'CONNOR: Labor Day Beach Bash August 30. www.portoconnorchamber.org

ROCKPORT: AquaFest August 30-31. www.rockportaquarium.com 361/727-0016

TOMBALL: Tomball Texas Music Festival August 30. www.tomballtx.gov 281/351-5484

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN: *The 1968 Exhibit* June 7-September 1. www.TheStoryOfTexas.com 512/936-8746

AUSTIN: Austin Ice Cream Festival August 9. www.roadwayevents.com

AUSTIN: Austin Bat Festival August 23. www.roadwayevents.com

BANDERA: Celebrate Bandera August 28-31. www.celebratebandera.com 830/796-4447

BOERNE: Kendall County Fair August 28-31. www.kcfa.org 830/249-2839

DRIPPING SPRINGS: Texas Senior Pro Rodeo August 1-2. www.tspra.com 512/598-5209

FREDERICKSBURG: Gillespie County Fair August 21-24. www.gillespiefair.com 830/997-2359

GRUENE: Old Gruene Market Days August 16-17. www.gruenemarketdays.com 830/832-1721

INGRAM: *Moveable Feast: The Artist Journey* August 6-September 12. www.hcaf.com 830/367-5121

JOHNSON CITY: Blanco County Fair and Rodeo August 14-16. www.bcfra.org

JONESTOWN: Swift Fest August 23. www.swiftfest.org 512/339-9432

JUNCTION: Summer Classic Rodeo and Dance August 8-9. www.junctiontexas.com

KERRVILLE: Guadalupe River Parade and Festival August 16. www.hometownherocard.com 830/377-9838

KERRVILLE: Kerrville Fall Music Festival August 29-31. www.kerrvillefolkfestival.com 830/257-3600

MARBLE FALLS: LakeFest Drag Boat Races August 8-10. www.marblefallslakefest.com 830/693-2815

SAN MARCOS: *Coming to Light: New Acquisitions* April 12-December 7. www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu 512/245-2313

STONEWALL: President Lyndon B. Johnson's

106th Birthday Celebration August 27. www.nps.gov/lyjo/ 830/868-7128

UVALDE: Hotter Than Hell 100-Mile Yard Sale August 1-3. www.visitualde.com 830/278-4115

UVALDE: Texas Labor Day Weekend Celebration August 29-31. www.uvaldecountyfairplex.com 830/591-9040

PANHANDLE PLAINS

ABILENE: Chili Super Bowl XXXII and Cook-Off August 29-31. 325/675-8412

ALBANY: *West Texas Triangle Art Exhibition: Ken Little* June 7-September 7. www.theoldjailartcenter.org 325/762-2269

ALBANY: Art Exhibition: James Magee June 7-September 7. www.theoldjailartcenter.org 325/762-2269

AMARILLO: *Treasure! Your Hunt has Just Begun...* May 24-September 12. www.dhdc.org 806/355-9547

BOYS RANCH: Cal Farley's Boys Ranch Rodeo August 30-31. www.calfarley.org 806/533-1200

CANYON: *Madonnas of the Prairie: Depictions of*

Women in the American West April 12-August 31. www.panhandleplains.org

CANYON: TEXAS Outdoor Musical May 31-August 16. www.texas-show.com 806/655-2181

DALHART: XIT Rodeo and Reunion August 7-9. www.xit-rodeo.com 806/495-5646

POST: Post Stampede Rodeo and Parade August 7-9. www.postcitytexas.com 806/495-3461

QUANAH: Quanah Riding Club Parade and Rodeo August 1-2. 940/663-2003

SAN ANGELO: *American Plains Artists Show* July 1-August 10. www.fortconcho.com 325/234-0316

VERNON: Summer's Last Blast August 8-9. www.vernontexas.net 940/552-2564

WICHITA FALLS: Hotter 'N Hell Hundred August 22-24. www.hhi100.org 940/322-3223

PINEY WOODS

GLADEWATER: Main Street Art Stroll August 9. 903/845-5753

GRAPELAND: Bluegrass Music Festival August 28-31.

[www.TexasBluegrass Association.com](http://www.TexasBluegrassAssociation.com) 936/697-5949

HUNTSVILLE: Frances Sprott Goforth Memorial Genealogy Weekend August 8-9. www.myhuntsvillelibrary.com

JEFFERSON: East Texas Performing Arts Festival July 25-August 16. www.etxpa.org 847/722-8798

JEFFERSON: Labor Day Celebration at the Historic Jefferson Railway August 29-30. www.jeffersonrailway.com 866/398-2038

LONGVIEW: Great Texas Balloon Race and U.S. National Championships July 28-August 3. www.greattexasballoonrace.com 903/753-3281

THE WOODLANDS: Celebration August 30-31. www.thewoodlandscvb.com 281/563-2447

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

ANDERSON: Stagecoach Day August 9. www.birthplaceoftexas.com 936/873-2633

BASTROP: Bastrop Homecoming and Rodeo July 31-August 2. www.bastrophomecomingrodeo.org

BEDFORD: Bedford Blues and Barbecue Festival

August 29-31. www.bedfordbluesbbq.com 817/952-2128

BELTON: Central Texas State Fair August 29-31. www.centraltexasstatefair.com 866/397-6324

BONHAM: Ruby Allmond Songwriting Contest August 2. www.rubyallmond.com 903/583-4651

CANTON: First Monday Trade Days July 31-August 5 and August 28-31. www.visitcantontx.com 877/462-7467

CLIFTON: Texas Troubadour Songwriting Classic August 16. www.bosqueartscenter.org 254/675-3724

DALLAS: *The World's Largest Dinosaurs* April 6-September 1. www.perotmuseum.org 214/428-5555

DALLAS: LEGO KidsFest August 29-31. 860/953-4500

DE LEON: Peach and Melon Festival and Tractor Pull August 5-9. www.deleonpeachandmelonfestivalandtractorpull.com 254/893-6600


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GRAPEVINE: *Human Plus* May 17-September 14. www.grapevinetexasusa.com 817/410-3185

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LA GRANGE: Fayette County Fair August 28-31. www.fayettetecountyfair.org 979/968-5911

LEWISVILLE: Labor Day Rodeo August 29-30. www.lewisvillesaddleclub.net

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www.navasotabluesfest.org 936/825-6600

PLANO: Ethiopian Day August 30-31. 214/321-9992

ROUND TOP: Blasmusik Texas Concert August 2. www.roundtoprifle.com 281/788-3278

SALADO: Blues, Brews and Base August 9-10. www.saladoevents.com 254/947-8634

SCHULENBURG: Schulerburg Festival August 1-3. www.schulerburgfestival.org

SEGUIN: Seguin Birthday Party August 9. www.visitseguin.com 830/401-0810

SHERMAN: *Dino Days Exhibit* July 5-August 30. www.theshermanmuseum.org 903/893-7623

SHERMAN: Deep Summer Bluegrass Festival August 20-23. www.melodyranchbluegrassfestival.com 903/546-6893

WACO: *Be the Dinosaur* May 24-September 3. www.maybornmuseum.com 254/710-1110

WASHINGTON: *Weather Wisdom: Forecasting in the Texas Republic* March 1-February 15. www.star-museum.org

WEATHERFORD: First Monday Trade Days August 29-31. www.weatherfordtx.gov 817/598-4351

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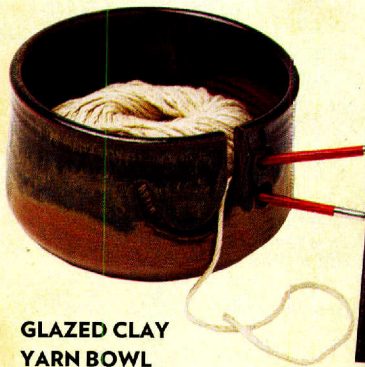
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In the *Creative* Moment

ARTIST BUCK WINN HELPED DEFINE
20TH-CENTURY TEXAS ART

Text by GENE FOWLER



LARGER THAN LIFE

An 800-square-foot concrete-and-Blenko-glass mural depicting the spirit of Texas State University, on Flowers Hall at the university in San Marcos.



**BUCK WINN
ON VIEW**

*The Wimberley Community Center displays portions of Winn's 1950 mural **The History of Ranching**, including the section above.*

THE ARTIST, INVENTOR, ARCHITECT, AND TEACHER Buck Winn first beheld the hills of Wimberley in the late 1930s. Enchanted by the valley's flowing waters and natural beauty, Winn and his wife, Kitty, bought 1,100 acres about two miles east of the old limestone buildings on Wimberley's square. There, the couple built a home and raised a family. Often working out of his home studio, Winn completed 50 major public art projects before his death in 1979. Though many of Winn's murals and sculptures were lost to redevelopment, a sizable number have been preserved. For example, you can see sections of his 1950 mural for San Antonio's Pearl Brewery, on the history of ranching, at the Wimberley Community Center. Other prominent works survive at the Gorzales Memorial Museum and at Fair Park in Dallas.

Born James Buchanan Winn in 1905 in the cotton-farming community of Celina, north of Dallas, Winn resisted his father's wish that he study agriculture at Texas A&M and instead pursued an art education at Washington University in St. Louis. Additional training at Academie Julian in Paris provided him the opportunity to travel to North Africa, where he marveled at Moorish and Egyptian architecture.

In 1930, living in Dallas, Winn associated with the bohemian "Pearl Street Gang," whose members included architect O'Neil Ford, writer Horace McCoy, and cartoonist Ed Reed. Winn also honed his craft with the "Dallas Nine"—an amorphous circle of artists known for their interpretations of regional landscapes and people in a style dubbed Lone Star Regionalism—and began earning money by painting portraits. Along with art by Jerry Bywaters, Otis M. Dozier, and Alexandre Hogue, Winn's artwork was showcased as part of the renowned exhibition at Fair Park's Dallas Public Art Museum titled *Nine Young Dallas Artists*. "Winn's choice of subjects in

Winn honed his craft with the "Dallas Nine"—an amorphous circle of artists known for their interpretations of regional landscapes and people in a style dubbed Lone Star Regionalism.



of Buck Winn, Savage hired Winn as his chief assistant in the creation of two murals chronicling state history. Winn also designed the hall's large gold-leaf Texas star, surrounded by symbols of the six nations whose flags have flown over the state.

At the fair's main entrance, on the grounds' western side, Winn created an 85-foot obelisk featuring bas-relief scenes of cowboys and wagon trains heading for Texas. All of Winn's known Fair Park works remain accessible for public viewing.

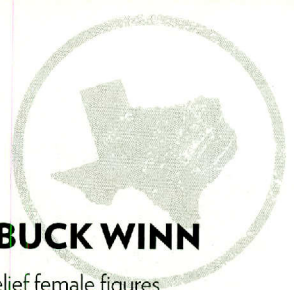
Texas Centennial planners in the town of Gonzales, today an important stop on the Texas Independence Trail, also noticed Winn's work and commissioned him to create two murals, which still grace the walls of the Gonzales Memorial Museum. One consists primarily of text detailing the town's history and contribution to Texas' quest for independence; the other depicts the "Come and Take It" cannon, so-named when Gonzales pioneers refused to hand the weapon over to the Mexican army at the outset of the Texas Revolution.

With the income earned from these works, Buck and Kitty headed for the Wimberley hills. When Buck's father first laid eyes on the artist's Hays County paradise, he famously snorted that the land was worthless for growing crops. Buck Winn is said to have smiled and replied, "I know."

the 1930s (primarily Texas agricultural) and his reduction of forms to their essential geometric antecedents, places him squarely in the Lone Star Regionalist camp," explains Michael Grauer, curator of art and western heritage at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon and coauthor of the 1999 book *Dictionary of Texas Artists*.

Winn received his first major commission in 1933, a large Texas-history canvas mural for the lobby of the Village Theatre in the Highland Park section of Dallas. The theater gave the mural, which depicts French explorer La Salle landing on the Texas coast in 1685, to the Dallas Historical Society during a 1980s remodel. The mural is currently in storage.

The 1936 Texas Centennial celebration at Dallas' Fair Park provided work for numerous local artists, though New Yorker Eugene Savage was commissioned to create the grand murals in the Hall of State. As related in the 2010 Hays County Historical Commission documentary, *Larger than Life: The Story*



MORE BUCK WINN

- Two bas-relief female figures created for either side of the screen at **Houston's River Oaks Theater**.
- **Frog Fountain at Texas Christian University** in Fort Worth, an outdoor sculpture of morning glories.
- A mural of South Texas history in the building that once housed **Victoria Bank and Trust**, now known as **120 Main Plaza**.
- Four fiberglass, 15-foot-tall Egyptian pharaohs in the Douglas MacArthur Academy of Freedom at **Brownwood's Howard Payne University**.
- Glass cross in the sanctuary wall and colorful abstract window design at **Wimberley Chapel in the Hills**.

The home the artist built, looking out onto a pristine valley, reflected his approach to life and art. Between the bedroom wing and the kitchen/dining/living wing, a spacious, rough-hewn studio hummed with activity. Daughter Kathryn Winn Eoff, who lives in the private home today, says that until she saw how her school friends lived, she and her brother Jim figured that every family must have a whirlwind of artistic activity in their house. "No one can remember seeing my father ever sit down," she recalls. "He was always involved in a project, always in the creative moment."



YOUNG BUCK

Buck Winn was a prolific artist who worked in a variety of mediums.



THE STORY OF BUCK WINN

The Hays County Historical Commission released the documentary *Larger than Life: The Story of Buck Winn* in 2010. Copies are available at the commission's website, www.hayshistoricalcommission.com.



On at least one occasion, Winn worked in miniature. His competition-winning design for a three-cent postage stamp, commemorating the centennial of Texas statehood in 1945, dramatized the Texas and U.S. flags, with the lone Texas star beaming into one of the United States flag's then-48 stars.

The History of Ranching, Winn's 280-foot-long mural for the round Pearl Corral entertainment hall at the Pearl Brewery complex in San Antonio, was believed to be the largest mural in the world when he painted it in 1950. The mural depicts pastoral scenes of cattle and landscapes, as well as cowboys at work and around a chuck wagon. In the 1970s, the mural was taken down, cut into 11 sections, and put into storage. Dorey Schmidt, a former University of Texas-Pan American professor

and Wimberley Institute of Cultures associate, tracked down the massive canvases in the 1990s and negotiated the transfer of some of them to the institute. In addition to the sections on display at the Wimberley Community Center, the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University owns three 28-by-6-foot sections of the mural. The university plans to install the restored sections in its Alkek Library after a library renovation is complete.

Authorized as a "professional associate" by the American Institute of Architects, Winn taught architecture at the University of Texas at Austin for seven years. Architect George Nordman told documentary filmmaker Richard Kidd for his 2010 film that Winn was an "unforgettable teacher" who "bubbled with ideas."

With the restoration and continuing care of his surviving works, and projects like the Hays County Historical Commission film, many Buck Winn appreciators hope that he won't be forgotten. "Buck Winn deserves to be part of the mainstream Texas art conversation, much more than he is now," says Grauer. "He deserves to be up there with Tom Lea and the other greats of early Texas art." ★

MADE IN TEXAS

The *Fringe* of Footwear

« continued from page 11] cuffs, holsters, and boots. Over time, the concentration of skilled bootmakers attracted major companies such as Tony Lama and Lucchese.

El Paso's infrastructure of leather importers gives Rocketbuster access to the finest materials, such as calf tanned in France, kangaroo tanned in Italy, or goat tanned in Massachusetts. "When we make an expensive product like ours, I have to touch every hide and make sure it's the *crème de la crème*, because we sell a very specialized item to people who want exactly what they want, and it's got to be of a certain caliber," Nevena says.

However, the traditional skill of making boots, which has been passed down through generations, is disappearing as the industry shifts to mass production and outsourcing. Nevena says that replacing each retiring craftsman is a challenge. To find new talent, she looks to other trades that require hand-eye coordination, such as artists, carpenters, and bartenders. "I really want a sushi chef," Nevena says. "To teach a sushi chef to skive leather would be perfect."

Custom bootmaking is painstaking work, and given the high prices that customers pay for Rocketbuster boots—from \$950 to \$5,000—the workshop takes its time. Rocketbuster finishes about six pairs of boots per week, has an order backlog of about 100 pairs, and currently runs five months for delivery. Because of the demands of custom bootmaking, significant growth would be counterproductive for Rocketbuster, Nevena says, but she hopes the company's success will be good for the industry as a whole.

"If we don't do it and make this fun and young, and teach, then what's going to happen? It's not going to exist, and that would be sad. Because no matter how the world feels about America, people will always love rock-and-roll and cowboy boots." ★



LONE STAR REGIONALIST

Buck Winn designed the gold-leaf Texas star in the Hall of State at Fair Park for the 1936 Texas Centennial Celebration.

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All Good in Arlington

Many visit Arlington seeking the high-flying screams of a roller-coaster or the decibel-busting cheers of the home crowds. And while any reason to visit Arlington is a good one, there's much more to this Metroplex midpoint than meets the eye.

8:30 A.M. To greet my day with a proper "howdy," I headed to **Rise and Shine**, a quaint Arlington diner with a big menu selection, including dozers of cmelet combinations and fresh biscuits that will make your eyes roll back in delight. After stuffing my belly on heaping portions of French toast and eggs, I was ready for a nap, but decided to press on.

10:00 A.M. Arlington is no stranger to exciting sports. To learn more about the city's gaming past, I headed to **Arlington Baptist College**, which rests atop what used to be a covert speakeasy called **Top O' Hill Terrace**. On a guided tour, I learned how gamblers used to sneak up from the basement via secret passages and into the tea garden, where police would find them enjoying nothing but a friendly soiree.

11:30 A.M. To see a more family-friendly side of Arlington's sporting legacy,

I drove to the **International Bowling Hall of Fame and Museum**. The world-class outfit documents the history of bowling—from Egyptian tombs to modern bowling-ball manufacturing—and honors the men and women who have excelled in the sport. I was amazed by the displays and eager to crush some pins of my own.

1:00 P.M. My choice for lunch was **J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill**. This Texas pub with a little "luck of the Irish" serves up tasty classics along with their own namesake invention, Irish Nachos, featuring potatoes (cottage fries) instead of tortilla chips beneath mounds of cheese, bacon, tomatoes, chives, onions, and jalapeños, with a side of sour cream. They were so delicious, "I-rish" I had room for seconds!

2:00 P.M. My next stop was **AT&T Stadium**, home of the Dallas Cowboys. While it was off-season for the team, it's

always open season at the stadium. I decided on a self-guided tour and found myself in the inner sanctum of this monster coliseum.

From the locker rooms to the field, it was a transcendental experience, especially standing on the 50-yard line beneath the massive video board. Since I had brought my own football, I spent the next couple of hours tossing the pigskin with my buddies. If the Cowboys score as many touchdowns as I did, they're sure to win the Super Bowl.

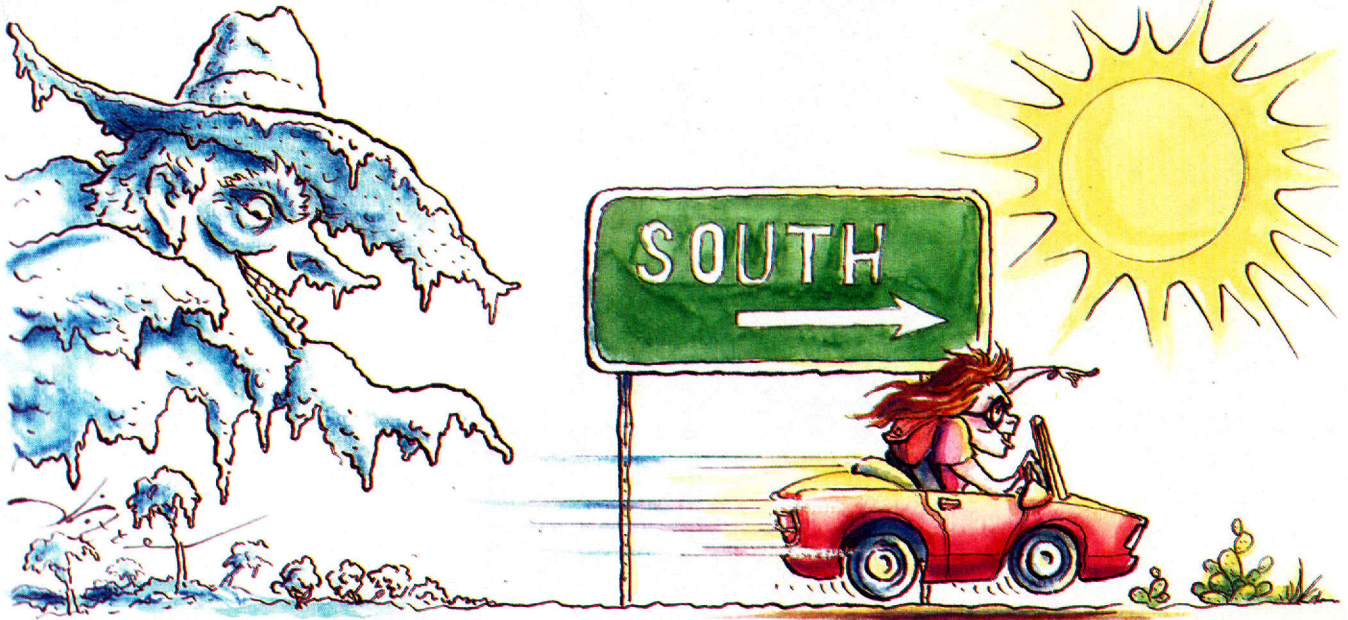
4:00 P.M. After time inside, I needed to sweat it out on the mountain-bike trails of **River Legacy Parks**. It's crazy to think of such excellent trails smack-dab in the middle of this bustling city. It was the perfect way to clear my mind and find some much needed solace along the Trinity River.

6:00 P.M. I headed for an ice-cold margarita at **Mariano's Mexican Restaurant**, the folks credited with inventing the frozen margarita machine. While the original machine (a modified soft-serve ice cream dispenser) is now in the Smithsonian, Mariano's still serves them up cold as the perfect complement to their classic Tex-Mex dishes. I can't remember a combo plate that paired more deliciously.

7:00 P.M. I stepped outside and could hear the faint cry of the crowds down the street at **Globe Life Park**. I followed my ears and found hundreds of Texas Rangers fanatics tailgating and migrating toward the stadium for the big game. On a whim, I grabbed a ticket and headed inside. Play ball!

After a box of Cracker Jacks and a few Ranger home runs, the game ended with Friday-night fireworks, and it was time to call it a day. There are lots of reasons to visit Arlington—on game day or just any day. So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path, I hope to see you on the road. ★

 **Contact the Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau, 800/342-4305; www.arlington.org.**



The Unexpected Journey

SPONTANEITY CAN BE THE SPICE OF LIFE

text by **Barbara Rodriguez** illustration by **Michael Witte**

I AM A PLANNER. I INHERITED THE “BE PREPARED” gene from my father, a career military man. For every family trip, there were always endless maps, brochures, schematics, and graph paper involved. I have likened his approach to planning any vacation to creating a battle plan.

All of which is to say, spontaneity and traveling—getaway fares, last-minute deals, a “let’s just see what happens when we get there” approach—had always been alien concepts to me. Right up until 1984.

It was January of that year when the well pump of my ramshackle, unheated Hill Country farmhouse froze solid—again. Young and in love, I was living with the starving artist of my dreams on 6,000 acres of rolling heaven near the Blanco River.

Overcome by discomfort, I did something I had never done before: I packed up in less than 20 minutes and left, with no clear plan other than to head south toward the Rio Grande Valley. But all was not sweetness and light in El Valle. The freeze that drove me out of the Hill Country was more insult to injury for Valley residents still struggling to recover from an even more brutal one weeks earlier. Along the highways, the palms stood tall and placid as ever, but rough brown turbans had replaced leafy crowns. The freeze had laid

waste to the citrus crop and devastated the aloe vera fields.

There I was, a burgeoning writer, right in the middle of a story no one else was writing. And just like that I found the beauty of the unexpected journey. I had run away from home smack into the first great byline of my career. I discovered, too, that exploring a grand new landscape—already beginning its slow recovery—unconstrained by an itinerary or expectations made for the best sort of travel.

I didn’t change my planning ways overnight. I still set forth carefully most of the time—but not always. Spur-of-the-moment decisions saw me hop a bus with a backpack as my only luggage. More radically, I once headed for the airport determined to catch the first flight out that I could afford, wherever it went.

It was that sprint from Jack Frost that opened my eyes to just saying yes to heading out without a battle plan once in a while. Not every impromptu trip has been successful, but the

Exploring a grand new landscape unconstrained by expectations made for the best sort of travel.

ability to embrace the journey-less-planned has frequently been the road to an epiphany—always a destination I look forward to. ★

Find Babs Rodriguez’s full adventure at texashighways.com/matters.

An underwater photograph showing a diver in the lower left, surrounded by numerous fish of various species swimming in clear blue water. The scene is vibrant and captures a rich marine ecosystem.

RearVIEW

ONE LAST THOUGHT

“Balmorhea remains my favorite swimming place in all of Texas—except for a few secret swimming holes, the locations of which I’ll never reveal.”

—Author Joe Nick Patoski, *Texas Highways*, May 2010

A DESERT OASIS, the pool at Balmorhea State Park offers opportunities for swimming, snorkeling, and scuba diving.

PHOTO: © Erich Schlegel

