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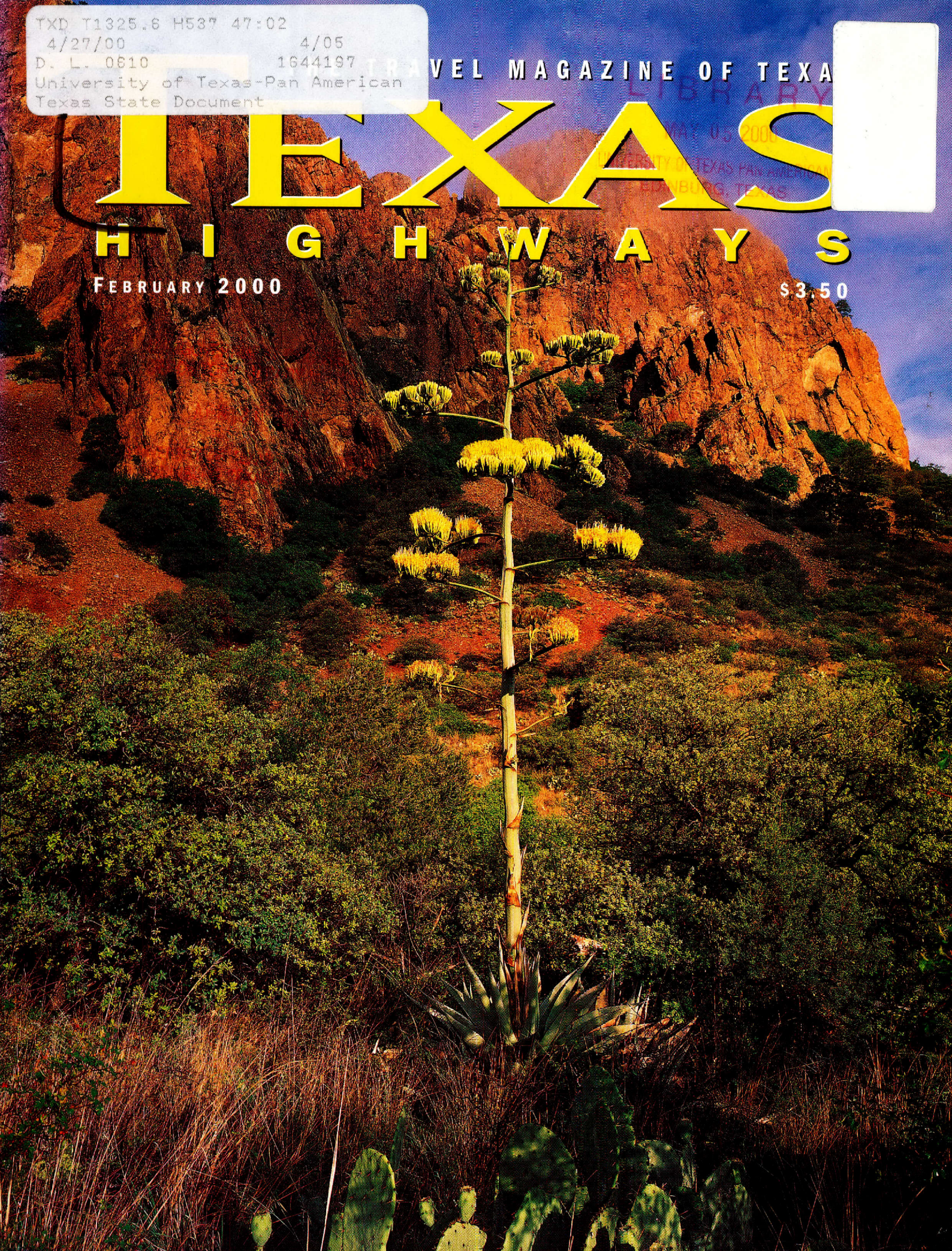
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TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

# TEXAS HIGHWAYS

FEBRUARY 2000

\$3.50





**S**usan Kirr, an Austin writer and filmmaker, tackled a tough topic for us this month—**favorite restaurants** in seven of Texas' main cities. If we didn't feature your favorite restaurant or town, there's no reason to take it personally. After all, Susan contacted only one food writer in each city, and the writers could only tout three choices apiece.

The restrictions were our doing—Susan would have liked to interview more critics and place fewer limits on them. But that's why we have editors—to wield the whip and accept the consequences.

We know that Texas abounds with multifarious and sundry other great restaurants. If I had polled seven editors on a favorite restaurant, I would have gotten seven different answers. So rest easy. We intend to tell you more about Texas' choice restaurants in issues to come. In the meantime, if you feel strongly about some of our omissions, write to Readers Recommend (see page 56), and let us know about *your* favorites.

Photographer **J. Griffis Smith**, who photographed the restaurants story, stumbled into a visual metaphor when **Michael Nosenzo** (see page 47), an El Paso food critic and private chef, shielded the powerful sun in front of the L&J Cafe with his dark glasses. Griff continued the theme when he asked **June Naylor Rodriguez** (page 50) to don *her* dark glasses at Joe T. Garcia's in Fort Worth. You see, restaurant critics like to maintain a degree of anonymity. That way, they can be treated like plain folks, and their reviews will reflect the food and service experience that any of us might encounter.



J. GRIFFIS SMITH

*Food critic Dale Rice keeps his identity under his hat as he samples the fare at Si Bon in Austin.*

That's why, when Griff and *Austin American-Statesman* critic **Dale Rice** came up with the shot above at Si Bon, they let only Dale's hands show. Dale wants to remain incognito so he can assess Austin's restaurants like a typical diner. . . .

This issue also features stories about **Mardi Gras! Galveston**, by **Cory Walton**; **old Brazos Valley cotton plantations**, by **Cathy Straley**; and **Big Bend in bloom**, by **Dale Weisman**. **Jan Edwards** and **Stephan Myers** also take us on a tour of the **Big Thicket**, America's biological crossroads, where **Diane Morey Sitton** and **Howard Peacock** delve into the realms where metaphor and medicine mingle.

Until our paths cross again next month, may you enjoy good food and good health.

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*Texas Highways* (ISSN 0040-4349) is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, 150 East Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas 78704. The official travel magazine of Texas encourages recreational travel within the state and tells the Texas story to readers around the world. *Texas Highways* is funded solely through sales of magazines and related products. © Texas Department of Transportation 2000. All rights reserved.



Internet sites: [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com); [www.traveltex.com](http://www.traveltex.com); and [www.dot.state.tx.us](http://www.dot.state.tx.us)

The editorial office of *Texas Highways* is at 150 East Riverside Drive in Austin. Call 512/486-5858; fax 512/486-5879. Send queries about manuscripts or photographs to Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009. We are not responsible for unsolicited materials.

Subscriptions to *Texas Highways* are \$17.50 annually (\$25.50 foreign). Single copies, \$3.50; back issues, \$5.00, plus shipping & handling. For subscription services, including ordering, changes of address, and requests to be removed from mailing list sales, write to *Texas Highways* Circulation, Box 149233, Austin, TX 78714-9233, or call 800/839-4997.

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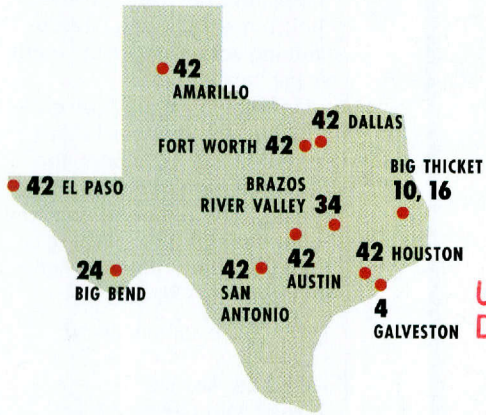
PRINTED IN U.S.A. ON RECYCLED PAPER



Periodicals Postage paid at Austin, Texas, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Texas Highways* Circulation, Box 149233, Austin, TX 78714-9233.



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**ABOUT OUR COVERS**

**FRONT**—Rain transforms the Chisos Mountains with patches of green and a multitude of flowers, including those of the agave, or century plant. For more photos of Big Bend's breathtaking blooms, turn to page 24. *Photo © Richard Reynolds*

**BACK**—Frivolity reigns at Galveston's Mardi Gras, as shown by the antics of this krewe member. To learn more about the Lone Star State's biggest celebration of this annual event, see the story on page 4. *Photo © Robert Mihovil*

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Food writers in seven Texas cities lay it on the line and name their favorite places to eat. The result: 21 sure bets for your dining pleasure

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## River Walk Romance

In last year's February issue, I read with interest that the San Antonio River Walk was chosen [by *Texas Highways* readers] the most romantic place in Texas.

I was a student nurse in San Antonio from 1942 through 1945. My friend was a soldier stationed at Fort Sam Houston. We often met downtown in front of the Buckhorn Saloon with the giant stuffed ape in the window. Having no car and very little money, we strolled the River Walk. There were other couples—soldiers and their girlfriends—walking, too. We were all well chaperoned by the military police that patrolled the river.

My soldier friend was sent to Europe, where he took part in the invasion of Normandy Beach, fought as an infantry rifleman throughout the European war, and received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. He returned to San Antonio in 1945, where we were married. That was well over 50 years ago. We are still married. The River Walk was a beautiful, romantic place then, and it is today.

ANN PARISH  
*Ingram*

## Moon River

I was quite surprised that in your August 1999 article on full-moon adventures, Texas River Expeditions' famous "Full Moon Over Boquillas" rafting trips [in the Big Bend] were not mentioned. We just don't want to be forgotten after 26 years of running rivers.

MARK EVANS, *via email*

Ed. Note: *Thanks for filling us in, Mr. Evans. Readers, dates for this year's "Full Moon Over Boquillas" trips are Jan. 19-22, Feb. 17-21, Mar. 18-23, Apr. 16-21, May 17-21, Sep. 11-16, Oct. 11-15, Nov. 9-13, and Dec. 9-13. Texas River Expeditions also hosts a "Valentine's Wine Tasting Gourmet" trip this month, on Feb. 12-13. For information or reservations, call 800/839-RAFT. Web site: www.texasriver.com.*

## CFS Revisited

As a West Texas boy, I must get into the chicken-fried-steak debate [see July 1999



**B**obbie Jean Hartnett (center) and friends take a break from Bible study at the Antioch Baptist Church.

story]. Back in the '50s, I was in the Army, stationed in Virginia with my high school buddy Donald (Skipper) Martin. One day, in a small cafe, we asked the owner if she had ever heard of a CFS. Of course, she said no. Skipper asked her how she breaded her fried shrimp. She said that it was a secret, that all the locals came there to eat her fried shrimp. Skipper told her to take two veal cutlets and beat them good with the edge of a saucer and drag them through that batter, then fry them in an iron skillet if she had one. Then cover them with white gravy. When she served them, she asked if she could have a bite of one. After tasting it, she asked if we would mind if she added CFS to her menu. We enjoyed CFS in Virginia for many more months.

KENNETH HORNE  
*Kermit*

## Norse Source

Lana Robinson's "Norse, Of Course" article on Bosque County (November issue) was beautifully done, but I looked in vain for a reference to A

*History of Bosque County Texas* (San Marcos Record Press, 1954) by the late William C. Pool, professor of history at Southwest Texas State University and a native of Bosque County and Clifton. I want to let interested readers know about this scholarly study (74 pages), which has a comprehensive bibliography, illustrations by the author, and a number of relevant maps.

RICHARD B. HENDERSON  
*San Marcos*

## Who's Who

The Guy Gillette photos [November issue] are no strangers to us; they are family photos. Rarely was a picture taken in our little country town in those days, and we enjoyed seeing them through a "stranger's" eyes. My young son saw the picture of the "country girl" on her front porch (page 26) while looking through the article with his mother. He recognized the girl as his great aunt Carol Ann Hartnett Evans, who still lives outside of Lovelady. My mother, Bobbie Jean Hartnett Drake, told us that Mr. Gillette must have taken

If you would like to write to *Texas Highways*, the editors would enjoy hearing from you. Though we are unable to print every letter, we just might select yours to appear in the magazine—whether you send us kudos or criticism. We reserve the right to edit letters. Write to Letters Editor, *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009, or fax 512/486-5879. Email: editors@texashighways.com.

© GUY GILLETTE

the picture the day he came to their house to read an award-winning school paper my mother had written.

On page 30, among the girls "twirling summer skirts" are my mother in the center and her sister Dorothy Ruth Hartnett Garney. The Antioch Cemetery in the background is where my mother's family is buried dating to the 1800s.

DAVID F. DRAKE, *via email*

## All-Stars Always

I read with pleasure your December article about the Texas Sports Hall of Fame in Waco. There is also a room there dedicated to Paul L. Tyson, the great Waco High School football coach of the 1920s and '30s. (I was on his 1927 team.)

Between 1921 and 1927, Waco High lost only two football games and won four state titles. I was not one of the stars—I only got to play when we were three or four touchdowns ahead. So far as I know, I must be one of the few 1927 players still alive.

HOWARD R. DUDGEON JR., M.D.  
*Waco*

## Hellish Humor

This response is a bit late, but I thought you all could use a laugh. When working in northern Kuwait as a mud engineer on Kuwait Santa Fe Rig #8, the company man (Charlie Rakowitz of Alice) and I had a great time with the August 1999 article about "The Devil in Texas." It's hot as hell in Kuwait, and we could readily identify with the article. Charlie received an email joke from his wife that goes like this:

A cattleman from West Texas died and went on to the Great Beyond. As he approached the great gate, he noticed that the terrain was bare with no greenery. He remarked to the gatekeeper, "Howdy, Saint Peter. Say, this looks just like Texas." The gatekeeper replied, "First of all, I'm not Saint Peter, and second, you really don't know where you are at all, do you?"

KURT RUTHSTROM  
*Freeport, via email*



## Cotton King

**B**right white rows of cotton bales stacked 12 feet high in the heart of Lockhart pay tribute at summer's end to the man with a sixth-grade education who overcame hardships to help make cotton king in Texas.

Alexander Duff Mebane (1855-1923), born to Scotch-Irish immigrants in Mebane, North Carolina, moved as a teenager in 1872 from Civil War-torn Tennessee to Hays County, Texas. Before long, the family built a two-room log cabin in Caldwell County and took up farming.

As an adult, Mebane dreamed of settling down and raising racehorses, but his dream went up in smoke in 1885, when fire destroyed his large barn and, with it, all of his horses. Burdened with debt, he spent the next 15 years struggling to supplement his meager farm income by raising fruits and vegetables and selling them door-to-door.

But horseracing's loss would prove agriculture's gain. By 1900, Mebane was introducing a new strain of cottonseed that would revolutionize the state's burgeoning cotton industry. Mebane Triumph cottonseed, developed over a period of 18 years, produced a winner: high-yield, storm-tolerant, drought- and boll weevil-resistant cotton that had a long, attractive fiber and was easier to pick than other varieties. Mebane's accomplishment—all the more remarkable because the agricultural pioneer was self-taught—earned him accolades from prominent scientists, merchants, politicians, and fellow farmers in Texas and around the world. Thanks in part to Mebane, Texas reigns in most years as the nation's top cotton producer, with a \$1.6 billion industry.

In 1904, Mebane, finally debt-free, was able at last to marry his sweetheart, Sarah Owen. In 1918, just south of Lockhart, the couple built a two-story, red brick, Prairie School-style mansion with eight massive Romanesque columns. Now a State Historic Landmark, the home is on Texas 20 (Lockhart State Park Road), just west of US 183.

Mebane went on to become one of Caldwell County's most prominent citizens, serving as an elder in the Presbyterian church and as president of the local school board. He died in 1923, six months after the *Lockhart Post-Register* published a special "Mebane Cotton Section" in his honor.

—Rob McCorkle, Lockhart



**A**fter a life in the fur trade on the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, the *Yellow Stone* came to Texas in the 1830s to transport cotton and other goods on the Brazos River. When the steambot passed the San Jacinto battleground soon after the Texian victory in 1836, the Texas troops on board lined the railings and presented arms to a military drumbeat.

THE STEAMER YELLOW-STONE BY KARL BODMER; COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY, MUSEUM OF NEBRASKA ART, NEBRASKA ART COLLECTION

## Arms and the Men

**T**he sidewheel steamboat *Yellow Stone* (or *Yellowstone*) played an important part in the fight for Texas independence. In late March 1836, the sturdy, 144-ton riverboat, used in the Brazos River trade (see story, page 34), was taking on cotton at Groce's Landing above San Felipe when Sam Houston and his Texian Army arrived on the other side of the river. Unable to ford the spring-flooded waterway, Houston hailed the *Yellow Stone*'s captain, John E. Ross, and commandeered the boat to ferry his men, horses, and equipment.

Once cotton bales were stacked to protect the boilers and pilot house from snipers' fire, the sidewheeler on April 12 made seven trips across the swollen waters to bring Houston and

his men to Groce's Landing. Afterward, on its way to the coast, the vessel raced downstream, enduring musket fire and barely avoiding one Mexican soldier's attempt to lasso her smokestack. (The boat spun completely around and struck the riverbank, but eventually reached the Gulf with her cotton cargo intact.)

Once across the Brazos, Houston and his men proceeded eastward to San Jacinto. About this same time, Mexican General Santa Anna and his forces were also crossing the Brazos, downstream. Texans know well the outcome of the two armies' fateful clash on April 21.

Shortly after the Battle of San Jacinto, President Burnett commandeered the *Yellow Stone* in Galveston to house the new Republic of Texas cabinet. In May, the boat carried the wounded Sam Houston, Santa Anna, the generals' staffs, and several dozen wounded prisoners to Galveston, then went to Velasco, where peace negotiations were to take place. Sam Houston later said of the *Yellow Stone*, "Had it not

been for its service, the enemy could never have been overtaken until they had reached the Sabine." The use of the boat, he said, "enabled me to cross the Brazos and save Texas."

In December 1836, the *Yellow Stone* carried the body of Stephen F. Austin from Columbia to Peach Point Plantation, the home of Austin's sister, for burial. Within a few months, the vessel disappeared from history, its fate unknown. Since such boats were built to last only a few years, none remain. The bells from two other Brazos steamboats, the *Hiawatha* and the *Alice Blair*, are displayed in the Columbia Historical Museum in West Columbia. A bell believed to be that of the *Yellow Stone* is displayed at the Alamo in San Antonio.

—Elizabeth W. Lewis, Houston







The New Year's resolutions have come and gone. The only signs of spring to come are the surfers waiting for waves off the seawall. Yet, as January melds into February, you can feel the atmosphere change in Galveston. The pace on this Gulf Coast barrier reef island picks up as the entire town joins in the singular focus of throwing a gigantic party—Mardi Gras! Galveston.

For 12 days this year, February 25 through March 7, Galveston explodes with color, pageantry, music, and frivolity for nearly half a million visitors, making this event by far Texas' biggest Mardi Gras celebration. New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro have nothing on it for style and spirit.

From the romantic to the raucous, the mysterious to the hilarious, this marathon of merriment beckons you with parades, trinkets, costume balls, music, food, and fun, not to mention golf, rugby, softball, and fishing tournaments, as well as art exhibits, crafts, and kids' games. More than 50 events keep the island hopping.

On The Strand (namesake street of the historic district), celebrants join mirthful throngs draped in bangles, beads, sequins, and plumes, dominated by the traditional Mardi Gras colors of purple, gold, and green. Young and old alike mingle and sway on streets that reverberate with live music from three outdoor stages. Fragrant aromas waft through the air as street vendors offer up foods ranging from fajitas and funnel cakes to Cajun

**Nine parades fill Galveston's streets with revelry during the island's raucous celebration of Fat Tuesday.**

jambalaya. For a few dollars at a vendor's booth, you can select a mask or another Mardi Gras accouterment and feel age and identity slip away, unleashing the wide-eyed child you'd almost forgotten.

The salt-tinged Gulf air rains colorful "throws"—engraved aluminum doubloons, strings of plastic beads, plastic cups, and stuffed toys—flung by celebrants from second-story windows and balconies or by parade participants on the floats. Merry-makers look skyward, shouting, reaching, jumping, and diving to catch the shiny trinkets. Never mind asking why a plastic necklace worth less than a dollar is suddenly so precious. You've caught the Mardi Gras spirit.

That rollicking, magic enthusiasm emanates effortlessly in Galveston. It's easy to see why, when you consider the tradition here spans more than 130 years. You can follow this colorful chapter of island history through intriguing artifacts, models, and photographs in the Mardi Gras Museum, located near the event's epicenter on Ship's Mechanic Row.

**FAT TUESDAY!**

For 12 days, Galveston explodes with color, pageantry, music, and frivolity for nearly half a million visitors, making this event by far Texas' biggest Mardi Gras celebration. New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro have nothing on it for style and spirit.

**m a R D I  
G a L V E S T O N  
G R a S!**





[ABOVE] The theme of Mardi Gras! Galveston changes each year, promising new surprises for revelers. With “Texas 2000” as this year’s theme, who knows what outrageousness will result?

Mardi Gras’ rollicking, magic  
spirit emanates effortlessly in

## GALVESTON.

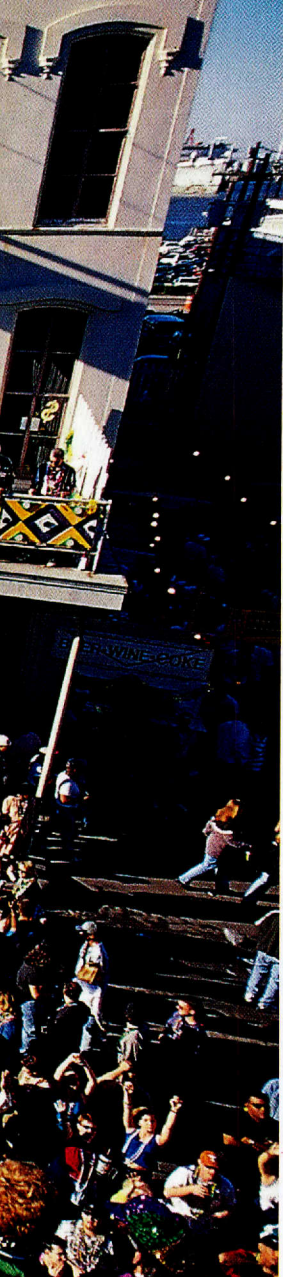
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more than 130 years.

Mardi Gras, French for “fat Tuesday,” dates to mid-winter masquerade festivities in pre-Christian Western Europe. Later, when the Catholic Church couldn’t squelch the madcap cavorting among its converts, it adapted the ritual as a final period of indulgence before the six-week-long Lenten season of sacrifice and abstinence that begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with Easter.

The tradition came to North America with the 19th-Century arrival of Roman Catholic immigrants, many of whom first saw this country through Galveston’s bustling seaport, later known as the “Ellis Island of the West.”

Galveston first publicly celebrated Mardi Gras in 1867 with dramatic entertainment and an elaborate masked ball. The annual blowout escalated in 1871 when two competing Mardi





**Mardi Gras' costume designers are no strangers to sequins, spangles, and other glittery adornments. Some 50 events make up the island's celebration, including street dances, parades, balls, and costume contests.**

Gras societies emerged, both staging coach-drawn, torchlit night parades and costume balls. The fête grew in scale and grandeur until 1900, when the city was devastated by the infamous hurricane.

As Galveston rebuilt itself, the Mardi Gras spirit reemerged and entered the 20th Century—only to be interrupted by two World Wars. After 1950, the festivities were largely private affairs.

Then, in 1985, oil entrepreneur, developer, and Galveston native George P. Mitchell sponsored a Mardi Gras revival to mark the reopening of the Strand's Tremont House hotel. Mitchell, his wife, Cynthia, and publicist Dancie Perugini Ware enlisted famed New Orleans float builder Blaine Kern to build nine spectacular floats. Hundreds of musicians in marching bands played in a mile-long night parade that concluded in front of the newly refurbished hotel. A black-tie ball for some 500

guests filled the city's recently restored 1894 Grand Opera House. Musical performances and the Strand's first Artwalk, an open house of the street's galleries, rounded out the week-long festivities.

"The parade drew about 75,000 people," recalls Dancie Ware. "They went wild, spilling out into the streets. It was then we knew this event had a future."

As part of the Mardi Gras revival, a handful of prominent Galvestonians resurrected the 1871 Mardi Gras society, or "krewes" (the old English spelling for "crew"), known as the Knights of Momus. The 1985 event's success spawned more krewes, comprised of local business leaders and civic-spirited individuals. There are now 16, boasting more than 2,500 members. With the City of Galveston's Park Board of Trustees overseeing the logistics, the krewes sponsor most of the events mak-



ing up the Fat Tuesday frolic.

Trent Morgan, president of the Krewe of Gambrinus (the Flemish god of beer), says his krewe will spend some \$350,000 on this year's celebration, refurbishing the floats and buying more than 9,500 pounds—51,000 strings—of beads, along with plastic cups and minted aluminum doubloons. Momus, the oldest and largest krewe, will spend nearly half a million dollars on Mardi Gras events this year, says krewe president Gary Peters.

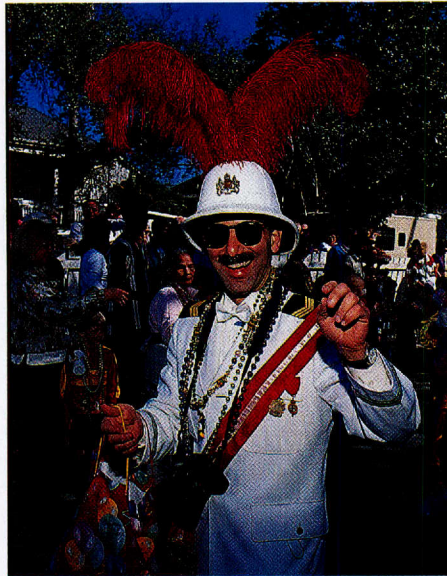
The krewes keep the overall celebration dynamic—each year they offer fresh surprises and delights. The floats, costumes, balls, and other events evolve around a central theme, which is researched and planned years in advance and kept a closely guarded secret. Recent years' themes include "Carnevale di Venezia," "México Magnífico," and "The Big Speakeasy."

Astonishing performers from around the world, like the precision twirling Flagmen of Sansepolcro, Italy, the percussive music and dance of the Bahamian Junkanoo, the large-scale performance arts of Spain's Miralda, and the orchestral pyrotechnics of France's Pierre-Alain Hubert, keep Mardi Gras! Galveston a world-class spectacle, year after year. Says Dancie Ware, "From the start, we tried to create an event that's a bit bizarre, with a very special flavor unique to Galveston. We wanted a festival not only to stimulate tourism, but to stir imaginations."

Orchestrating a city-wide shebang of this size means that planning for next year begins almost as soon as the celebration finishes. Says Krewe Gambrinus' Trent Morgan, "Thirty days after the event is over, we have a big party, celebrate our success, and invite sponsors to commit their support for the coming year's events."

Five months later, artists from Blaine Kern Studios begin adapting and redecorating their floats—stored in a Galveston warehouse—with larger-than-life thematic figures sculpted from cloth, Styrofoam, fiberglass, and papier-mâché.

Costume designer Danny Morgan will make hundreds of costumes for ball-goers and "maskers" (costumed float riders). "I start getting calls in June with orders for the coming February event," he says. Danny will order 1,500 ostrich plumes, 400 yards of sequins, almost 10,000 Austrian crystals, and hundreds of yards of crushed velvet, gold lamé, and other fabrics for his creations.



**A plumed krewe member shows off his Mardi Gras style.**

Gene Binder, senior consultant for Fisherman's Wharf and Fish Tales restaurants, says the two eateries will order 5,000 pounds of Gulf shrimp to fortify hungry Mardi Gras revelers. Favorite Fat Tuesday fare includes Andouille sausage and shrimp gumbo, crab cakes, and specialty "shrimp kisses"—Gulf shrimp stuffed with cheese and jalapeño pepper, then wrapped in bacon and fried. The restaurants' bartenders will mix thousands of "Galveston Hurricanes" and other libations.

All the year's planning and preparations become apparent as the fête's second weekend approaches. The crowds of carnival celebrants in the Strand District grow in size and exuberance. Headline music acts sound off from the entertainment stages. Mardi parties and krewe galas for every age, interest, and income fill area hotels, parks, theaters, and nightspots.

The madness builds to a thundering climax as Saturday's Momus Grand Night Parade (March 4) sets sail at dusk from the junction of 21st Street and Seawall Boulevard. The colossal, illuminated procession includes more than 3,000 musicians from more than 20 marching bands, in addition to a fabulously garbed Philadelphia Mummers marching string band. Masked passengers on the floats toss several tons of throws to the crowds lining the two-and-a-half-mile parade route.

By the time the parade reaches the festively bannered streets in the Strand District, a sea of gleeful, cheering revelers awaits. The parade culminates as it passes the Tremont House hotel. Here, a cannon blasts confetti into the air as huge spotlights atop the buildings criss-cross overhead in an intoxicating sight-and-sound extravaganza.

Inside the Tremont, dressed-to-the-nines guests who've paid top dollar for a masquerade party enjoy a lavish dinner buffet, live music, carnival performers, and premier viewing of the passing parade.

Next morning, the Mardi Gras melee begins to wind down, taking on a local, family flavor. The Krewe of Barkus and Meoux Parade features costumed cats and dogs and their proud owners. Later, 500 children put on the Munchkins Krewe parade, which features 13 floats that include Elsie the celebrity milk cow and a kid-size train. Fat Tuesday arrives with a final feast as Z Krewe hosts a pancake breakfast, and another krewe representing local police, fire, and emergency service workers, called Krewe Dan Rude, staffs several "bead rescue mission" sites, where revelers can donate unwanted beads for future kids' events.

By Ash Wednesday, Galveston has returned to its low-key, late-winter repose. But you'll leave the island with mementos of the town's vibrant Mardi Gras spirit: the colorful beads that now dangle from your car's rearview mirror, quietly clicking with the promise of next year's merriment. ★

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Austin freelance writer CORY WALTON came to know and love Galveston during countless visits over the two years that his wife, Marsha, was enrolled at the island's University of Texas Medical Branch.

The work of Galveston photographer ROBERT MIHOVIL appears regularly in *Texas Highways* and other publications.



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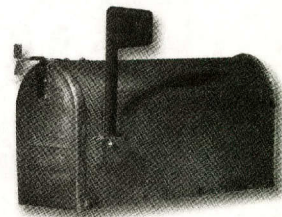
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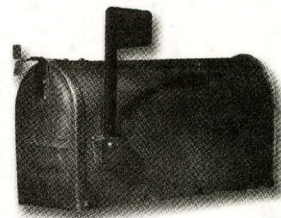
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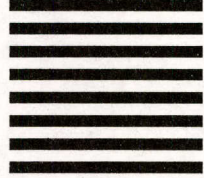


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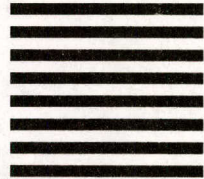
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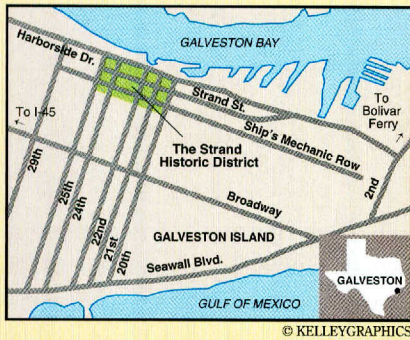
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## Mardi Gras! Galveston

Galveston Island is 50 miles south of Houston. From Houston, take I-45 South over the Galveston Bay Causeway. On the island, I-45 becomes Broadway. To get to The Strand Historic District, where most of the public Mardi Gras festivities take place (live music and other entertainment, vendors galore, bead-throwing, parades, and other revelry), take Broadway to 24th St., and turn left. Continue 7 blocks to The Strand Historic District, which runs between 25th and 21st streets on Strand St. and Ship's Mechanics Row. During Mardi Gras, free shuttles run from most Seawall hotels to and from the entertainment district.



Here's a mere sampling of Mardi Gras! Galveston's new-millennium madness. *For a complete schedule of events, including performers and appearance times, call the Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau, 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753. Web site: [www.mardigrasgalveston.com](http://www.mardigrasgalveston.com).*

### Live Music

On both Fridays, the Strand Historic District's "Texas" stage, at 23rd and Strand, features live music 7 p.m.-11:45 p.m. At press time, performers for Feb. 25 and Mar. 3 had not been confirmed.

On both Saturdays, the entertainment district's three music stages feature live music 10 a.m.-11:45 p.m. At press time, performers for Feb. 26 included The Flatlanders (Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock), The Fabulous Thunderbirds, and Robert Earl Keen; for Mar. 4, Little Feat and The Temptations.

### Parades

Mardi Gras' 9 parades include the **Mystic Krewe of Aquarius' 14th Annual Mardi Gras Parade** (Feb. 26 at noon, beginning at 14th and Seawall Blvd. and proceeding down Seawall to 59th St.); **The Z Krewe's Z Procession, King Zanie VI Salutes Texas 2000** (Feb. 26 at 1 p.m., beginning at 26th and Ship's Mechanic Row and wending throughout the entertainment district); the **Pin-stripe Pasquinade** (Feb. 26, 2 p.m., beginning at 25th and Ship's Mechanic Row and winding through the entertainment district); **King Gambrinus Waltzes Across Texas** (Feb. 26, 6:30 p.m., beginning at 14th and Seawall and heading down Seawall to 63rd St.); the **Krewe of Espirit Rosaire**

**"Millennium Magic Parade"** (Mar. 4, 11 a.m., beginning at 27th and Seawall and heading west); the **Momus Grand Night Parade** (Mar. 4, 5:45 p.m., perhaps the granddaddy of Mardi Gras parades, beginning at 21st and Seawall and proceeding to The Strand); the **Krewe of Barkus and Meoux Parade for Animals** (Mar. 5, 1 p.m., beginning at Ave. M and 25th St., proceeding to Shearn Moody Plaza and ending on 26th); the **Krewe of Munchkins kids' parade** (Mar. 5, 2 p.m., starting from the 1500 block of 25th St.); and the **Mystic Krewe of Aquarius Annual Fat**

Tickets cost \$50 per person. For reservations, call 409/765-5534 after 5 p.m.

On Mar. 3, the San Luis Resort Hotel (53rd and Seawall) hosts an elegant black-tie festival called **San Luis Salutes Mardi Gras! Galveston 2000**. The soiree features dazzling performances, stylish costumes, and a seated dinner, followed by dancing. Call 409/744-1500 or 800/445-0090 for reservations and ticket prices.

On Mar. 4 at noon, the San Luis hosts a **costume contest**. Outlandish entries, celebrity



As the wildly decorated floats move through the streets, their costumed riders (called maskers) toss thousands of beads and doubloons into the eager crowds.

**Tuesday Procession** (Mar. 7, 6:30 p.m., through the entertainment district).

*Note: To see the parades that wend through the Strand Historic District on Sat., you must purchase an admission ticket to the entertainment district.*

### Other Events

At 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 25, Mardi Gras! Galveston's longest-running event, the 44th annual **Treasure Ball and Royal Pageant**, takes place at the Galveston Island Convention Center at Moody Gardens (One Hope Blvd.). This is a semi-formal ball with live Big Band music, a dinner, and the presentation of more than 100 new Mardi Gras capes and costumes.

judges, a special children's category, great prizes, and rowdy spectators make this an annual family favorite. Contestants register at the *Galveston County Daily News* office, or in the San Luis Grand Ballroom on contest day. Free to spectators. Call 409/744-1500 or 800/445-0090.

The ultimate parade party, the **Tremont House Masquerade Gala** (Mar. 4, 5-10 p.m. at the hotel, 2300 Ship's Mechanic Row), includes a reception, a lavish buffet, live music, and premier viewing of the Momus Grand Night Parade. Tickets cost \$175. For reservations (call well in advance), call the Tremont House hotel, 409/763-0300 or 281/480-8201.



*The folk medicine that once sustained Big Thicket residents was a curious mixture of common-sense survival, homespun botany, magic, and myth.*

*By Howard Peacock and Diane Morey Sitton • Photographs by Stephan Myers*

“MY GRANDMA took me to see the Coushatta medicine woman when I was 10 years old,” recalls Frances Battise, a registered nurse who serves as health clinic coordinator at the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation in the upper Big Thicket. “I had asthma real bad.”

“The medicine woman made us walk into the woods. When we reached a small clearing, she told me to stand still. My heart pounded as she took a big knife and drew a circle in the dirt around my feet.

“She began to chant strange words, and then said, ‘When I finish singing, I want you to jump out of the circle and run so I can bury your illness.’

“While she chanted, she cut bark from a tree trunk. The instant she stopped singing, I bolted away. When I looked back, a flicker from the knife blade caught my eye. She was using it to flip the dirt where I’d been standing.” Later, the medicine woman went to the Battise house carrying the bark she had cut in a small pouch.

“She blew into the bag four times through a long reed,” Frances continues. “In Indian medicine, the number four represents the four seasons and the four directions. Grandma boiled the bark in a large kettle. She made me inhale the steam for four nights. I’ve never been short of breath since.”

The folk medicine that once sustained Big Thicket residents was a curious mixture of common-sense survival, homespun botany, magic, and myth. It sprang from the beliefs of a melting pot of settlers from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, the Carolinas, West Virginia, and Virginia—states that shared with southeast Texas part of the American Southern Forest and its remarkable flora. Explorers and travelers from France, Spain, Mexico, and Germany flung their traditions and customs into the *mélange*, as well.

“Prior to World War II, we had very few effective medicines—mainly alcohol, aspirin, quinine, digitalis, and morphine,” says

Dr. Allen Hooks, a fourth-generation resident of Hardin County who has practiced medicine in the Big Thicket for more than 40 years. “In earlier times, folks had to compound a lot of their own medicines. That’s how the use of native plants came about.”

For folk healing, Big Thicket fields and forests supplied a treasure-trove unequalled anywhere on the continent, or, for that matter, in most areas of similar size in the world. Dubbed “America’s Ark” and “the Biological Crossroads of North America,” the Thicket boasts at least 10 major ecological systems or plant communities. Approximately 1,000 kinds of flowering plants thrive in the region, including 85 species of trees, and more than 60 species of wild shrubs. Scores of native orchids and ferns, plus an astonishing assortment of herbaceous plants, grasses, algae, fungi, and mosses complete this botanical bonanza.

“I like to apply a certain law to Big Thicket folk medicine,” says Dr. Hooks. “And that is, if there’s a problem, there’s a solution close by. In other words, if there is a disease indigenous to an area, the cure likely lies close by in the plant life.”

For Big Thicket settlers, the ills and ailments that challenged their resolve included whooping cough, amputations, diphtheria, diarrhea, lockjaw, rabies,

snakebite, various wounds and broken bones, and malaria. Some researchers count nearly 90 afflictions that affected pioneers and their bloodstock. Folks also relied on homespun medicine for the delivery and care of newborn babies.

Few people in Tyler County know more about the business of birthing than Marie Moye, a retired LVN and midwife. For more than four decades, her joyful face was a welcome sight in farmhouses and remote cabins from Beaumont to Livingston to Jasper. Sometimes, when the hunch hit her that it was “time,” Moye confesses that she would sneak off her shift at the local hospital to answer “God’s calling.”



[WILD BLACKBERRY]  
*A tea made from roots of wild blackberry was used to treat stomach distress.*

[FACING PAGE] Marie Moye, a retired Tyler County LVN and midwife, holds sassafras roots and leaves. Boiling the roots of the sassafras tree produced a popular medicinal tea.



BIG THICKET FOLK MEDICINE

FOREST PHARMACY



*For folk healing, Big Thicket fields and forests supplied a treasure-trove unequalled anywhere on the continent, or in most areas of similar size in the world.*

"In the early days, I assisted Ronnie Bean," Marie reminisces. "Everybody around here just called her Aunt Ronnie. She was close to 100 years old when she passed away a while back. If a baby had colic, she'd pick some catnip by the side of the road and boil it into tea. For rashes, she'd tie an onion in a bag and stick it in the fireplace until it roasted. Then she squeezed out the juice and mixed it with the mother's milk for the baby to drink."

Inventive doctoring was commonplace in Big Thicket midwifery. "I gave mothers castor oil to induce labor," says Marie. "It would get the baby coming, or if it wouldn't, it would get the mom cleaned out. It's a stimulant is what it is."

When the placenta wouldn't turn loose, Marie draped hot towels soaked in turpentine across her patient's abdomen.

"Sometimes I'd tease and tell 'em I was going to snuff 'em (give them snuff)," she smiles. "Snuff makes you sneeze."

In many households that summoned Marie, mothers believed that sewing a piece of asafetida into a bag and dangling it around a youngster's neck repelled germs. Asafetida is a fetid gum resin formed on

certain plant roots. Perhaps the potent odor of the gummy goo kept germ-carriers at a distance. Stomach distress called for a tea made from blackberry root (*Rubus trivialis*), also called Southern dewberry tea. Small bleeding cuts invited primitive bandages concocted from coal oil mixed with cobwebs. Larger wounds prompted treatment with green oxidation, called verdigris, scraped from copper pennies.



[WOOLLY MULLEIN]  
Alabama-Coushatta Indians found several medicinal applications for these fuzzy leaves.

**F**EARING the common cold might escalate into a fatal bout of influenza or pneumonia, Thicket folks, especially those living in dank bottomlands during the 1800s and early 1900s, used multitudes of treatments to thwart the symptoms.

At the first sign of fever, Indians and settlers made tea from yellow bitterweed (*Helenium tenuifolium*), abundant in overgrazed pastures. A simmering decoction of sweet-scented red bay (*Persea borbonia*) was favored to quell a cough. Persistent symptoms sent sufferers to the butchering shed to collect molded hog hooves.

"They started by poking the hooves into hot ashes," Marie explains. "The heat turned the hooves into a kind of charcoal brittle. The next step was to crumble them into boiling water."

Old-timers gulped several doses of hog-hoof brew each day to calm their coughing.

Despite the bevy of medicinal home brews, the beverage of choice was sassafras tea, made by boiling the roots of *Sassafras albidum*, a tree that grows abundantly from Canada through the eastern United States and south to the Big Thicket.

It's unlikely that Big Thicket folks knew the miraculous healing powers attributed to sassafras by Nicholas Monardes. In 1574, the official physician of Seville called sassafras a "sovereign remedy" for malaria, lameness, fevers, liver

distress, and loss of appetite. In southeast Texas, settlers routinely sipped the springtime tonic to "thin the blood," quell a cold, or suppress respiratory afflictions. Nowadays, sassafras has lost its luster as a medicine or even as a tonic, because a component of its chemistry has been found to be possibly carcinogenic. Applications of sassafras are most frequently external now, used to treat rheumatism and skin irritations.



[YELLOW HORSEMINT]  
This mint provided relief from headache, fever, and nosebleed.



[ECHINACEA]  
Echinacea is more popular than ever as an over-the-counter remedy for numerous ailments, especially colds.



## THE WOMAN WHO BUYS WARTS

There's more to folk medicine than lotions, potions, and poultices. Let me tell you about the woman who buys warts.

I met her some years ago while writing a story about the historic regions where the Big Thicket touches the Trinity River. She's an expert on the lore of that area and was good enough to guide me to key places and people thereabouts.

On the afternoon of the day we spent exploring, as I felt the sun searing my bare scalp, I said, more to myself than anyone else, "I'm growing a big wart on my head that needs some shade." She overheard me and glanced up. "Yep, I see it," she said. "Looks like a four-bit wart to me. I'll buy it."

I paused and grinned. "Say again?"

"I buy warts," she said simply. "Want to sell me that one?"

Chuckling at the ridiculous idea, I flopped a sweat-wet bandanna over my reddening pate. Who ever heard of such a thing as buying warts?

But it was a better offer by far than the one I'd had earlier that week from my barber, Claude Gulley. Stropping his razor—*ka-chuck, ka-chuck, ka-SLAP*—he had said, "You've got an ugly thing coming on up

here. It's real close to where I'm gonna shave off some fuzz. Do you want me to leave it?" I did.

The woman's curious offer stuck in my memory. So the morning after my trek around the Trinity, I peered at the wart in my bathroom mirror. It bristled uglier than ever. I called her and said four bits sounded fair. That evening, I felt the wart while watching television, then darted to a mirror to confirm my tactile examination. Amazingly, the thing had shrunk to less than half its morning size. The next day, I touched the spot, and the crusty growth just fell away.

Talk about coincidence! Why, the woman hadn't even had time to mail the four bits to me, and the wart was gone.

Recently, two or three years after the above experience, a wart started growing in the center of my forehead, about an inch above and between my eyes. I've read where Oriental mystics consider that area a spiritual center. In fact, some women of South Asia paint a circle there. My new wart grew larger and darker by the day. My wife, Kitty, fussed at me to do something about it. I stopped watching TV commercials about skin cancer.

On a visit to our family

doctor for my annual physical, I pointed out the wart. He looked at it long and closely. He felt it and the area surrounding it, frowning and sighing.

"Well, Howard," he diagnosed, "yore hide's gettin' old." I thanked God that he had been at the top of his graduation class in medical school.

But the wart kept growing bigger and darker, which brought more hassling from Kitty. I remembered the woman of the Trinity and, as soon as Kitty got busy elsewhere in the house, I called her. I didn't want Kitty, a world-class skeptic, to know what I was up to. I described the wart's location and characteristics to the woman.

"You've got a two-bit wart there," she said crisply. I sold it to her without quibbling.

After lunch that same day, the wart started shrinking in size and getting paler. On the following morning, at the lightest finger pressure, it crumbled to specks in the lavatory. Pow! Just like that! Voilà! And four days later, I received an envelope from the woman with a hand-written note and a hard, circular object about the size

of a quarter wrapped tightly in brown paper and taped shut.

"Do not open the wrapping," the note instructed. That was all.

At her request, I'm obliged to not reveal the identity of this imaginative and singular soul. She says she couldn't abide the paperwork likely to result from being identified, much less the price-setting and payouts.

While I'm astounded that anyone would ever think of buying warts, the most remarkable fact of her folk medicine is that the warts begin withering away almost the hour that she strikes the bargain. In the name of Hippocrates and the hocus-pocus of Houdini, that's telepathic zapping. Right?

I keep the unopened two-bit piece—and I believe that's what it is—in my medicine cabinet. The next time a wart crops up, I will gently rub it with the talisman from the woman of the Trinity. Or might the healing power be a purely mental thing, residing totally in the idea itself? Or, on the other hand, is a two-bit piece enough to cover the zapping of an extra wart?

—Howard Peacock

For colds and flu-like symptoms, Maude "Mom-O" Slankard, born in 1899 in the Butter Bean Island community east of Moss Hill, favors a pungent compress.

"Mix one tablespoon each of coal oil, turpentine, camphor, and Vaseline," she says with authority. "Soak a flannel cloth in the mixture, and put it on your chest."

Few disabilities were more serious than broken bones, especially to families like Maude's that farmed cotton near the Trinity River bottoms.

"We set the bone, rubbed the place with turpentine, then



[YELLOW BITTERWEED]

Indians and early settlers used this plant as an ingredient for tea to treat fever.





Gulf black willow contains chemicals in its bark that were used in the original aspirin.

applied a cloth pack soaked in red-oak tea to prevent infections,” says Mom-O.

Blood poisoning, another dreaded affliction, called for a poultice of red-oak bark (*Quercus falcata*) solution combined with cornmeal.

In the far western fringes of the primitive Big Thicket, Pam Puryear’s ancestors turned to Gulf black willow (*Salix nigra*) and other *Salix* species for pain.

“The willow is a shining light,” says Pam, an avid plantswoman who lives in the house her great-granddaddy built in Navasota in 1871. “A decoction of inner bark, which is chemically akin to aspirin [salicylic acid is found in willow bark], seemed to lower temperatures, thin the blood, and reduce headaches.” Toothaches sent settlers in search of Hercules-club (*Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*), a small tree with a distinctive, thorny trunk. “Old-timers planted ‘toothache tree’ in their yards,” says Pam. “Its inner bark has a numbing effect on gums. It was the 19th Century’s equivalent of Ambisol.”

Like many other Big Thicket trees and plants, common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) endeared itself to early explorers and settlers for its varied uses. The foliage, rich in vitamin C, yielded a fortifying beverage. The dark, fissured bark rendered an astringent wash. When boiled into tea, the deep-plunging roots provided a remedy for “flux” (diarrhea).

Knowledgeable families harvested the yellow to red-hued persimmons after the first frost, believing the chill of an autumn morning sweetened the fruit. Wildlife, too, cherished the luscious winter treats.

“Settlers had to compete with all sorts of critters,” says Pam. “There’s an old ditty that goes raccoon in the ’simmon tree, possum on the ground; possum told the raccoon to chuck that ’simmon down.”

Woolly mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), another old-time medicinal staple, thrives throughout the Thicket and notably in the hilly terrain of Polk County. The Alabama and Coushatta Indians pressed its 15-inch-long, flannel-like leaves against wounds to stop the flow of blood. They also cooked the foliage to make a chest plaster for pneumonia, smoked pipefuls of dried leaves to relieve asthma, and boiled the roots into a strong, bitter tea to allay back pain.

“Wild mint grew everywhere, too,” says Frances Battise. “When somebody died, we rinsed our faces with mint tea for four mornings and four evenings so the spirit of the dead person wouldn’t bother us.”

When concocted into cold- or hot-water astringent washes, the fragrant foliage of wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*), and yellow horse-mint (*Monarda punctata*) provided relief from headache, fever, and nosebleed, respectively.

**M**IRACLE drugs all but obliterated folk medicine in the Big Thicket. Doctors became fairly plentiful, and hospitals arose throughout the region. One generation, then another, went to college, to war, to jobs in nearby cities, and forgot the old customs and concoctions as they embraced new ways of life.

With the dawn of the millennium, however, interest in the medicinal qualities of native plants has grown. Botanical medicines, now slickly packaged and mass-marketed in capsules, tablets, liquid extracts, tinctures, and teas, lure shoppers even in mega-stores and supermarkets. Echinacea, the purple cone-flower of the Big Thicket and the Great Plains, lines pharmacy shelves in whole-root, liquid, and powdered form. “Nutraceuticals,” a new term coined to keep pace with the burgeoning market, refers to herbs included in fruit drinks, candy bars, and other conventional foods for their health-promoting properties.

“I have believed for years that the cure for practically every human ill is growing right around us in the Big Thicket...if we just knew the curative components, how to extract them from



## For Real-Plants that Heal

the plants, and how to use them," says Dr. Hooks. "Right now, about 45 percent of the world's medicines comes from wild plants. We're gradually learning to isolate the ingredients that treat illnesses, then synthesize them."

In the meantime, in some niches of the Big Thicket, the old ways and provincial customs live on.

"Native healing was the only medicine we had while I was growing up," Frances Battise says. "I'm a trained, educated nurse, but I practice a lot of the natural healing I learned from my Coushatta grandma. I still use the wild mint—it works. Just last week, I picked bay leaves. The tea I boiled from them helped me get rid of a cough and cleared my chest congestion. I value my heritage. I want to keep learning about the old ways."★

Award-winning author HOWARD PEACOCK of Woodville ("Tush Hog" to Big Thicket friends) was active in the 50-year-long fight of conservationists to "Save the Big Thicket" that resulted in establishment of the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974.

DIANE MOREY SITTON of Colmesneil authored the popular *Texas Gardener's Guide to Growing and Using Herbs* (TG Press, 1990). She recently completed a story for next month's issue about marvelous Mercer Arboretum and Botanical Gardens in Spring, Texas.

Photographer STEPHAN MYERS, a recent transplant to the Lake Sam Rayburn area, enjoyed meeting some of the Big Thicket's lifelong residents.



Frances Battise, health clinic coordinator at the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation in the upper Big Thicket, examines a member of the mint family that is still brewed into tea.

Plants used in folk healing may be observed throughout the region known as the Big Thicket, an area that once encompassed some 3.5 million acres of south-east Texas (see map, page 23).

The **Big Thicket National Preserve** consists of 12 units covering some 86,000 acres. It offers exceptional opportunities to explore nature, including canoeing, hiking trails, and a year-round roster of naturalist activities that includes trail walks, plant-identification outings, and lectures on folklore. *Naturalist activities by reservation only.* Visit the Big Thicket Information Station by traveling 7 miles north of Kountze on US 69/287 before turning east on Farm-to-Market 420 for 2.5 miles. Hours: Thu-Tue 9-5, Wed 10:30-5. Call 409/246-2337; or write to the BTNP Headquarters, 3785 Milam St., Beaumont 77701; 409/839-2689. Web site: [www.nps.gov/bith/default.htm](http://www.nps.gov/bith/default.htm). Email information requests to [BITH.Administration@nps.gov](mailto:BITH.Administration@nps.gov). *Plant collecting is illegal without a permit (issued for research purposes only), available through the preserve's superintendent.*

The **Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary** (on Texas 327 between US 69/287 and US 96) is a 5,651-acre mosaic of desert, bog, creek bank, and forest (see "Sandyland Sanctuary," March 1999). Many of the sanctuary's 800 species of plants may be observed from 3 trails, including a nearly one-mile interpretive loop. Hours: Daily, sunrise to sunset. Admission: Free. Not wheelchair accessible. A trail map and other information are available from The Nature Conservancy of Texas office (open Mon-Fri 9-5) at 1250 US 96 South, Silsbee 77656. Write to Box 909, Silsbee 77656-0909; 409/385-0445. Web site: [www.tnc.org/texas](http://www.tnc.org/texas).

**Village Creek State Park**, near Beaumont, offers hiking, camping, and other recreation-

al opportunities. Write to Box 8565, Lumberton 77657; 409/755-7322. For rates and reservations at this and all other Texas state parks, call 512/389-8900.

The **Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation**, on US 190 between Livingston and Woodville, highlights folklore, historical uses of native plants, and tribal history through tours, demonstrations, and exhibits. *Reservation presently closed; reopens in May.* Write to Rt. 3, Box 640, Livingston 77351; 409/563-4391 or 800/444-3507. Web site: [www.alabama-coushatta.com](http://www.alabama-coushatta.com).

### Field Guides


To learn more about the flora of the Big Thicket, look for the following books in your local library or bookstore: *Nature Lover's Guide to the Big Thicket* by Howard H. Peacock (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1994), *Wild Flowers of the Big Thicket, East Texas, and Western Louisiana* by Geyata Ajilvsgi (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1979), and *Trees of East Texas* by Robert A. Vines (Univ. of Texas Press, 1985).

For a superb scholarly treatment of folk medicine, see *Healing Traditions* by native Texan Bonnie Blair O'Connor (Univ. of Penn. Press, 1995).

*Texas Folk Medicine* (Encino Press, 1970), a publication of the Texas Folklore Society, lists "1,333 Cures, Remedies, Preventives, & Health Practices" compiled by John Q. Anderson.

A splendid University of Texas master's degree thesis that features Native American uses of Big Thicket plants was authored by William Edwin Shapard Folsom-Dickerson in 1952. On file at the university's Perry-Castañeda Library in Austin, it's titled "The White Path Ethnology of the Alabama-Koasati Indians of Texas." (Koasati is an old form of spelling Coushatta.)



A photograph of a dense forest. In the foreground, a large, dark tree trunk with prominent roots dominates the left side. To the right, a stream flows through the woods, reflecting the surrounding trees. The background is filled with more trees, some with autumn-colored leaves. The overall atmosphere is dark and mysterious.

THE BIG THICKET

Preserving the Mys





BY JANET R. EDWARDS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHAN MYERS



In the deep, dark woods of East Texas resides a magical, almost spiritual place. It has been known by many names: the Big Woods, the Biological Crossroads of North America, America's Ark, the Tight-eye Thicket, and the Bear Hunter's Happy Hunting Grounds. But nowadays, most Texans just call it the Big Thicket.

Embroidered with countless leaves, the forests and swamps of this region harbor giant trees set among a tangle of branches, vines, shrubs, and wildflowers. Pine needles, colorful mushrooms, and carpets of moss decorate the understory, scenting the air with an earthy freshness. Yet ecosystems in the Big Thicket also sustain the unexpected: a giant luna moth balanced on yellow blooms of a rare lady's-slipper orchid; a roadrunner stalking a skink lizard across arid, sandy uplands; patches of lime-green, carnivorous pitcher plants catching bugs in boggy wetland savannahs.

Long before Anglo settlement of Texas began, the original Big Woods covered at least 3.5 million acres. Black bears, mountain lions, red wolves, and ivory-billed woodpeckers inhabited the forest, sharing their home with Bidai, Patiri, Deadose, Akiosa, and later, Alabama and Coushatta Indians. When the Spanish explorers arrived, they gave the Big Thicket's swamps and dense forests wide berth despite its abundant game, as did Anglo pioneers of the 1820s.

But by the 1850s, settlers had begun penetrating even the woods' densest section, which spreads into present-day Polk, Liberty, and Hardin counties. The area was so overgrown that it had served for decades as a favorite hide-away of outlaws, murderers, and vagabonds, as well as the scene of heart-stopping tales about bottomless quicksand and man-eating reptiles.

**In the thick of the Big Thicket, a cypress swamp flanks the Neches River corridor in southern Jasper County.**





© GEORGE HOSEK

Sunlight streams through a cypress slough on the Kirby Nature Trail, which starts at the Big Thicket Information Station near Kountze.

Around the same time the Anglos arrived, commercial timber interests began cutting the region's virgin longleaf pine and bald cypress, floating them down the Sabine and Neches rivers, and replacing them with monoculture plantings of nonnative slash pines. Sawmills soon sprang up, along with railroads that could haul the lumber to distant markets. Oil strikes at Saratoga, Sour Lake, and Batson just after the turn of the 20th Century took an additional toll on the Big Thicket, poisoning vast numbers of tupelo and bald cypress trees when the brine from drilling leaked into creeks and bayous. Gradual clearing for farms, ranches, towns, and cities claimed even more land. By the mid-1960s, only about 300,000 wilderness acres remained.

Dozens of distinguished folks—scientists, politicians, environmental activists, and caring citizens—worked feverishly over a period of nearly six decades (beginning in the 1920s) to save what remained. They lobbied the Texas and U.S. legislatures and tried to create a groundswell of grassroots support for this natural—and national—treasure. Among them, the late Senator Ralph Yarborough became known as the Big

Thicket's "most powerful proponent in Congress." Though all deserve recognition, few spoke more passionately on behalf of the region than the late Archer Fullingim, fiery editor of the *Kountze News*.

"Look up and listen," he is quoted as saying to Bob Armstrong, former Texas Land Commissioner, in Armstrong's foreword to Pete A.Y. Gunter's book *The Big Thicket: An Ecological Reevaluation*. "In here you can hear the Holy Ghost. And they're cuttin' it down, Boy. If we don't do something, it'll all be gone," said Fullingim.

In 1974, the tireless efforts paid off, when President Ford signed into law a bill that authorized creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve. Today, the preserve consists of 12 biologically distinct regions or units, encompassing some 86,000 acres, scattered in mostly separate sections over an area of southeast Texas that extends east from Romayor to Evadale, and from Woodville south to Beaumont. Three more units (an additional 10,766 acres), set aside in 1993 by legislation signed by President Clinton, will be added officially to the preserve as soon as land exchanges for national forest lands are completed. This will bring a total of nearly 100,000 acres under the preserve's protection.

Though tossed across the map like wayward, disconnected puzzle pieces, nine of the preserve's current units are actually linked by protected waterways—among them Pine Island–Little Pine Island bayous, Menard Creek, and the

Neches River—lush, lowland corridors that harbor some of the Big Thicket's most scenic and dynamic habitats.

Though Village Creek State Park and the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary (see story, March 1999) near Silsbee protect additional Big Thicket acreage, much valuable natural habitat in the original Thicket (such as Mixed-Grass Prairie) remains in private hands, and, consequently, is extremely vulnerable to development. These remnants have recently inspired the Big Thicket Association, an organization founded in Saratoga in 1964, to actively solicit funds for conserving more Big Thicket wilderness.

At first glance, much of the Big Thicket, as its name suggests, appears as a dark, impenetrable hinterland. But closer inspection reveals habitats of incredible biological wealth. In fact, compared with forest lands of similar size elsewhere in North America, it holds a far greater number of ecosystems. Here, animals and plants (from southeastern swamps, central plains, eastern forests, Appalachian hills, and southwestern deserts)—rarely seen this far north, south, east, or west—interact in blended habitats unique to the state, the nation, and the world.

To acknowledge and publicize this rich variety of plant and animal life, the United Nations in 1981 designated the Big Thicket as a "Man and the Biosphere Preserve," a rare distinction that allows this national sanctuary, with its 10 ecosystems—Beech-Magnolia-Loblolly forests, Cypress Sloughs and Baygalls, Palmetto-Hardwood Flats, Arid Sandylands, Oak-Gum Floodplains, Longleaf Pine Uplands, River Edges, Pine Savannah Wetlands, and flower-strewn roadsides—to serve as living laboratories for biological research, as well as indicators of global environmental health.

"Despite the region's worldwide and

[FACING PAGE, TOP] In spring, bird's foot violets (shown at left with bracken fern) bloom in the Thicket's sunny spots. Right, fungi, mosses, liverworts, and algae proliferate on the forest floor.

[FACING PAGE, BOTTOM] Dwarf palmetto plants (shown here at the Lance Rosier Unit, near Saratoga) dominate the understory where water-logged, clay soils occasionally dry out.





TWENTY-SIX TYPES OF FERNS SOFTEN SHADY WOODLANDS AND RIVER BOTTOMS. AS IF THIS WEREN'T ENOUGH, UNTOLD NUMBERS OF MUSHROOMS, MOSSES, AND ALGAE CARPET THE FOREST FLOOR AND STREAM FLOOD-PLAINS.







© LAURENCE PARENT

**In his *Nature Lover's Guide to the Big Thicket*, Howard Peacock calls the tree-canopied Beech Woods Trail—in the Beech Creek Unit near Spurger—a “natural for solitude.”**

migrant and resident birds—perhaps more—inhabit the region, along with more than two dozen species of mammals, including bobcat, mink, and beaver. At least 50 kinds of reptiles, including the red-eared slider and the Mississippi alligator, flourish here, along with hundreds of thousands of different insects.

Twenty-six types of ferns and fern-like

well-deserved reputation as a place of tremendous diversity, it is possible to drive or walk through the Big Thicket and totally miss it,” says David Baker, a resource education specialist with the Big Thicket National Preserve. “To appreciate it, you need to come prepared with a basic knowledge of botanical features, or bring along a trained guide who can point them out. Then, watch carefully for unusual combinations of ordinary things.”

The preserve shelters a complex ecotone, that is, a region where ecosystems commingle. And because a change in elevation of just a few feet can cause dramatic differences in vegetation, within and between these communities flourish a bedazzling blend of semiarid, temperate, and subtropical species usually separated by hundreds, even thousands, of miles across North America.

Sadly, the black bear, the red wolf, and the ivory-billed woodpecker are long gone from the region, pushed to extinction by hunting practices and habitat destruction. Despite such losses, the Big Thicket still supports an astonishing variety of living things. For example, nearly 200 kinds of

allies (including liverwort and horsetail) soften shady woodlands and river bottoms. Eighty-five species of trees and 60 of shrubs, some of champion size, soar heavenward, garnished by nearly 1,000 other kinds of flowering plants, including more than 30 types of wild orchids and four of North America’s five genera of carnivorous plants. As if this weren’t enough, untold numbers of mushrooms, mosses, and algae carpet the forest floor and stream flood-plains.

The key to this incredible variety lies beneath the earth’s surface, buried in the region’s geology. Between 1.6 million and 10,000 years ago, the Gulf of Mexico periodically rose and fell, in concert with periodic freezing and melting of the polar icecaps. As mud, sand, and gravel deposits from central parts of the American continent were laid down by rivers, the coastal region of Texas moved continuously southward. From interglacial periods through today, these various soils have been subjected to differing degrees of water saturation, producing different ecosystems and their attendant life forms.

In this process, northern sections of the Big Thicket developed generally

well-draining, arid soils, while the southern sections often developed poorly draining, water-soaked soils. By the time the ice sheets began to thaw and retreat again northward, many species of flora and fauna that had originally lived much farther north had found suitable growing conditions in the Big Thicket’s diverse habitats.

Like its geology, the area’s annual rainfall of 50 to 60 inches, flowing through the many kinds of soils, also underpins the Thicket’s cornucopia of life.

At higher elevations, where you find remnants of ancient river deposits and coastal dunes, water drains away very quickly through deep sand, creating an arid habitat suitable for desert species like yucca and prickly pear. At lower elevations, far-less-permeable clay soils create ideal substrata for cypress sloughs, flood-plain forests, shallow wetland baygalls (acidic, swampy areas), and palmetto-hardwood flats. Between these two extremes of moisture lie grassland prairies, mixed pine-hardwood forests, and wetland savannahs. In certain areas of the Big Thicket, these highly distinct ecosystems may exist only a few hundred yards apart. Ironically, two of these habitats, wetland savannahs and prairies, survive only if regularly scheduled and carefully controlled brush fires are allowed to remove encroaching underbrush.

Whether or not the 85,000 people who annually visit the Big Thicket National Preserve understand the variety and singularity of the region, they find abundant outdoor delights—fishing, swimming, canoeing, hiking, and nature-watching. While the preserve offers only primitive camping, nearby state and private parks offer more camping amenities.

A good place to begin your own discovery of the Big Woods’ bodacious diversity is the Big Thicket Information

**[FACING PAGE, TOP] Longleaf pines (left), with their 10-inch cones, thrive in the Thicket’s sandy upland ecosystems, whereas cypress and tupelo trees (right) flourish in spongy swamps.**

**[FACING PAGE, BOTTOM] The nickel-size, carnivorous sundew plant (left), which frequently grows in large clusters in wetland savannahs, traps and digests tiny insects. Another wetland savannah inhabitant, the pitcher plant (right), captures insects and even tiny frogs.**





**W**HETHER YOU'RE A BUDDING OR AN EXPERIENCED NATURALIST, IT'S POSSIBLE TO SPEND MONTHS, EVEN A LIFETIME, EXPLORING THE NUMEROUS TRAILS THAT CRISSCROSS THE BIG THICKET'S 12 UNITS.







Myriad species of ferns flourish in the Thicket's damp, sandy soils.

Station, on FM 420 (2.5 miles east of US 69 and seven miles north of Kountze), at the southernmost end of the preserve's Turkey Creek Unit. Here, you'll find a wealth of maps, books, pamphlets, photographs, and objects from nature that can help you better understand the forest's lore and legacy.

Just outside the Information Station, look for the Kirby Nature Trail, a pleasing promenade that begins with a gentle hike past an awesome assemblage of enormous beech trees, their grayish bark parquered with lichens. Farther on, loblolly pines display sparkling tufts of evergreen needles, while stately magnolias saturate the scene with bouquets of wide, glossy, evergreen leaves. Where the path slopes downward, you may spy comical jack-in-the-pulpits, with their tiny, hidden, green flowers among the leaf litter and tangled vines of smooth-barked rattan.

Soon, you'll cross a wooden bridge that leads to a baygall community.

Found at the bottom of forested slopes, these strange, almost mystical bogs develop when abundant rainfall runs through fallen leaves and pine needles and collects at the bottom of the slope. The water dissolves tannin, a black astringent chemical in the leaves that turns water the color of brewed tea. An acidic, oxygen-poor environment low in nutrients results. Despite these harsh conditions and having wet feet some of the time, red bay trees and gallberry holly thrive on the edges of these eerie swamps and give the "baygall" its name.

At the northern apex of the trail's inner loop lies a floodplain community, where bald cypress trees of startling dimensions rise from quiet sloughs. At the base of these giants, myriad ghostly apparitions called cypress knees (structures that may serve as aerial roots) emerge from the murky waters.

Pitcher plants, one of several meat-eating plants found in the Big Thicket, flourish in the wetland savannahs. You'll find them growing in lush abundance along the Pitcher Plant Trail, at the northern end of Turkey Creek Unit. These emerald deceivers, shaped like candy canes, offer sweet nectar in pools at the base of long, slippery tubes, or "throats." Tempted by the luscious scent, unwary insects, even tiny frogs, soon find themselves unable to escape and eventually sink in a bath of digestive enzymes.

One could spend months, even a lifetime, exploring the numerous trails that crisscross the Big Thicket's 12

units. Many of the trails traverse three or more different ecosystems, each an ecological treasury for the naturalist, whether budding or experienced. But even when you learn to distinguish an American beech from a swamp tupelo, a wetland savannah from a baygall, there's still more to discover about the woodland.

"Somebody has said that the environment is more complex than we think it is, and it may be [even] more complex than we can think," says David Baker. "Biological diversity is a big deal for both emotional and economic reasons, not just for scientists, but for everyone. Not only is a diverse landscape more interesting and appealing to the eye, but it also provides greater recreational and educational opportunities, and better habitat for game.

"When we're looking around the natural world for answers to human problems, such as new medicines, food, or sources of energy, we need to view it as a giant puzzle," David continues. "If at least part of every puzzle piece has been saved, we're more likely to figure out the big picture and find better solutions to these problems. Therefore, it's to our distinct advantage to keep expansive areas of natural habitat intact and undisturbed."

As you come and explore the Big Thicket's complexity, its curious combinations of the strange and the ordinary, the rare and the everyday, don't be surprised to discover new, inspiring insights about life's conundrums. For here, in this patchwork of paradise, ever-fresh perceptions shimmer along shores of a shallow cypress swamp, glisten in sticky droplets of a dime-size, carnivorous sundew plant, float upon the lemony scent of a southern magnolia bloom, and yodel from the merry soul of a mockingbird. ★

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Husband-and-wife team STEPHAN MYERS and JAN EDWARDS, who live a short distance from the Big Thicket National Preserve, relish their journeys into the deep dark woods.



# The Big Thicket

If you enjoy spending time with Mother Nature, the Big Thicket National Preserve is for you. Stop first at the **Big Thicket Information Station**, on Farm-to-Market Road 420, 2.5 miles east of its intersection with US 69 and 7 miles north of Kountze (open daily 9-5, except on Wed., when hours are 10:30-5; closed Christmas and New Year's days). Wheelchair accessible. Write to 2912 FM 420, Kountze 77625; 409/246-2337. Here, you can peruse educational literature, ask questions of the knowledgeable staff, and pick up a copy of the *Big Thicket Official Map and Guide*, which shows the location of each unit, describes leisure activities available, and explains the region's natural history.

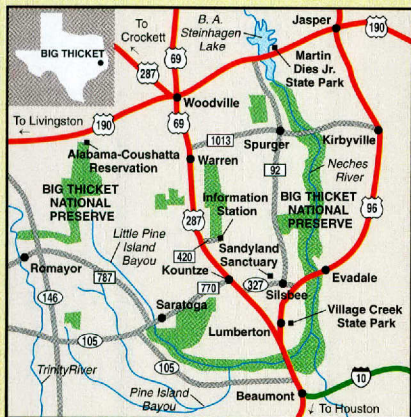
Customized group activities, such as canoe trips, workshops, and guided hikes, must be arranged in advance. Busiest seasons are spring and fall (especially weekends), when temperatures are milder. A booklet, available at the entrances to the Kirby Nature Trail and the Sundew Trail, provides information for a self-guided tour.



The imperial moth has a wing span of four inches. As a caterpillar, it eats pine needles and the leaves of hickory, oak, and maple trees.

Hiking or walking shoes are recommended on the trails (boots in low areas, particularly after a rain). Bring along sunscreen, drinking water, mosquito repellent, and at least one illustrated guide to East Texas vegetation.

A variety of scenic canoe excursions are available, including a tranquil, 93-mile ride from B.A. Steinhagen Lake to Beaumont on the Neches River. A 37-mile trip down Village Creek from US 69 to the Neches (a favorite section is



between FM 418 and Texas 327) offers more-adventurous canoeing. For the best back-country excursion, try canoeing the 49-mile ribbon of Pine Island-Little Pine Island bayous from FM 770 near Saratoga to US 69/96 in Beaumont. Information about shuttling services from area outfitters is available at preserve headquarters.

For general information, write to Supt., Big Thicket National Preserve, 3785 Milam, Beaumont 77701; 409/246-2337. Web site: [www.nps.gov/parks.html](http://www.nps.gov/parks.html).

The **Big Thicket Association** publishes a newsletter, the *Big Thicket Reporter*, that covers conservation efforts, ecotourism development, and plans for upcoming projects, such as the long-awaited official Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center (at the intersection of US 69 and FM 420) and a university research station/education center in Saratoga. For information about the Big Thicket Assn. or the newsletter, write to Box 198, Saratoga 77585-0198, call the preserve headquarters at 409/839-2689, or check the association's Web site, [www.ih2000.net/bigthicketassociation/bta.htm](http://www.ih2000.net/bigthicketassociation/bta.htm).

Camping is available at **Martin Dies Jr. State Park** (Rt. 4, Box 274, Jasper 75951; 409/384-5231), a facility with water and electricity hookups and tent sites on the shores of B.A. Steinhagen Lake (15 miles east of Woodville via

US 190 and Park Rd. 48), where towering pines and mixed-hardwood forests accent prime lake vistas. **Village Creek State Park** (Box 8565, Lumberton 77657; 409/755-7322), situated off US 96 in Lumberton, is another good choice.

Primitive camping (bring your own water, pack out what you pack in) within the preserve is permitted only in designated units and on sandbars along the Neches River.

On Texas 327, at the Village Creek crossing near Silsbee, lies the **Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary** (see story, March 1999), owned by The Nature Conservancy of Texas. Self-guided nature trails begin at the parking lot and traverse several ecosystems. Enjoy a picnic near the trail head, where a pavilion offers a high-bluff vantage point over Village Creek. For guided tours or more information, write to Box 909, Silsbee 77656; 409/385-0445.

The **Watson Pinelands Preserve and Studio**, near Warren, opens to the public at no charge. Here, you will find most of the plant communities that make the Big Thicket famous, including many rare and endangered native species and the area's 7 species of orchids. Butterflies abound in spring and summer, birds and mammals year round. Guided tours, offered by owner and manager Geraldine Watson, may be arranged in advance. (Geraldine is a former plant ecologist/ranger for the National Park Service and an author of books on Big Thicket and Neches River ecology; her vegetational zone studies helped determine which sections of the Big Thicket to preserve.) Write to Geraldine Watson, Rt. 2, Box 887, Warren 77664; 409/385-7239 or 547-3543.

Several area communities sponsor other events and attractions that relate to the Big Thicket and

the East Texas forest heritage. Write to the **Lumberton Chamber of Commerce**, Box 8574, Lumberton 77657 (409/755-0554), or to the **Hardin County Tourist Bureau**, Box 400, Kountze 77625 (409/246-8000 or 800/835-0343).

## Books

To learn more about the Big Thicket, look for the following books in your local library or bookstore: *Nature Lover's Guide to the Big Thicket* by Howard Peacock (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1994); *The Big Thicket of Texas: America's Ecological Wonder* by Howard Peacock (Little, Brown, and Co., 1984); *Forest Trees of Texas: How to Know Them*, Bulletin No. 20 of the Texas Forest Service (1963); *Wild Flowers of the Big Thicket, East Texas, and Western Louisiana* by Geyata Ajilvsgi (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1979); *Big Thicket Plant Ecology: An Introduction* by Geraldine



Workshops, guided hikes, and canoe trips number among the group activities led by Big Thicket rangers (advance arrangements required).

Watson (Big Thicket Museum, 1975; an expanded, revised edition, published by the Big Thicket Assn., will be released later this year); *Tales from the Big Thicket* edited by Francis E. Abernethy (Univ. of Texas Press, 1966); *The Big Thicket: A Challenge for Conservation* by Pete A.Y. Gunter (Jenkins Publishing Co., 1971); *The Big Thicket: An Ecological Reevaluation* by Pete A.Y. Gunter (Univ. of North Texas Press, 1993); *Land of Bears and Honey: A Natural History of East Texas* by Joe C. Truett and Daniel W. Lay (Univ. of Texas Press, 1984); and *Thicket Explorer* by Maxine Johnston (Big Thicket Museum, 1973).



BY DALE WEISMAN

# Big Bend Country

Where Wildflowers Wait for Rain





The craggy landscape of the Big Bend region softens with the rosy colors and delicate textures of the bell-like flowers of the yucca (facing page) and the moisture-sensitive cenizo on this page.





Bright goldeneye blooms in the foreground of compressed volcanic ash, also called tuff, near Castolon Peak.



*Big Bend's springtime floral bounty* belies the widespread belief that the Chihuahuan Desert is a barren wasteland. On the contrary, the desert abounds with life that's ingeniously adapted to the hot climate and scarcity of water.

**A** vaquero of legend who called Big Bend “the place where the rainbows wait for rain” spoke the poetic truth. Here in this Chihuahuan Desert heartland west of the Pecos, myriad flowering plants—from herbs, shrubs, and trees to cacti, agaves, and yuccas—await life-renewing rains that usher in a floral extravaganza as showy and multihued as any rainbow. Given a modicum of rain, something blooms in Big Bend country year round. Even in late July and August—the region's so-called “fifth season”—monsoonal showers trigger lavish displays of flowering perennials and cacti. But of all the seasons, springtime is showtime for the flower fanciers, botanists, birders, photographers, landscape painters, and desert-lovers who travel hundreds of miles to see Big Bend in bloom.

“Big Bend's spring wildflower season offers greater variation and intensity of color than any other time of the year,” says David Long, a state park ranger and botanist at the Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center in Lajitas, the eastern entrance to Big Bend Ranch State Park. “March and April are the prime times for wildflower viewing, because



The nectar-rich blooms of the century plant, or Havard agave, provide nourishment for all manner of winged creatures, especially hummingbirds.

we have Big Bend bluebonnets and other annuals, as well as cacti and yuccas in bloom.”

“The spring bloom varies as the months go by,” adds F. Gus Sánchez, a national park ranger and naturalist at Big Bend National Park. “The flowers start blooming in February at the lowest elevations where temperatures are warmer—like Castolon and Rio Grande Village. As we go to March and April to May, the bloom ascends to the higher elevation center of the park, toward the Chisos Basin.” *(continued on page 30)*



The intense scarlet of Indian paintbrush gives the desert one of its most striking floral displays.





Prickly pear blossoms

© RICHARD REYNOLDS



Trailing four-o'clock and rainbow cactus

© RICHARD REYNOLDS



Heyder nipple cactus

© RICHARD REYNOLDS



Strawberry cactus

© RICHARD REYNOLDS



Big Bend bluebonnets thrive among blind prickly pear cacti.









The intricate flowers of the ocotillo can make a dazzling crimson display in the springtime.



**B**otanists have identified more than 1,000 Big Bend plant species, most of which bear eye-catching blossoms. The list of bloomers includes not only herbaceous annuals and perennials but also trees and shrubs like pink-blooming fragrant mimosas, the extravagantly flowering Mexican buckeye, and whitethorn acacia, with yellow flower heads. Even the scraggly, much-maligned creosote bush dons fuzzy yellow blossoms after a good soaking rain, permeating the desert air with a fresh, pungent fragrance. By late spring and early summer, longspur columbine, cedar sage, and yellow primrose—and the hummingbirds they attract—add splashes of color to the moist upper canyons of the Chisos Mountains.

Big Bend's plethora of cacti attracts legions of camera-toting "cactophiles," who time their West Texas sojourns to see colorful cactus blossoms at their peak in early to mid April. According to naturalist and author Roland Wauer, Big Bend National Park harbors more than 70 kinds of cacti—more than any other national park in the United

States. These succulent bloomers range from the ubiquitous yellow-flowering prickly pear to the scarlet-blossomed claret cup and the fragrant, night-blooming cereus—Big Bend's only cactus that flowers after dark.

In early April, the national park's northern perimeter becomes ground zero for an explosion of blooming yuccas. "The yuccas are great bloomers," says Gus. "The Torrey yucca tends to bloom first in late February and early



© WILLARD CLAY

**Curled nama (the clump of purplish flowers) and mallow cling to a rocky spot above the Rio Grande in the southern reaches of Big Bend National Park.**

March at lower elevations, from Persimmon Gap to park headquarters. After that, the giant dagger yuccas at Dagger Flat bloom. An interpretive auto trail at the park's north end takes you into a forest of giant daggers. When they bloom, the sight can be overwhelming."

The poster child of Big Bend bloomers—and one of the earliest to rise and shine with spring color—is the Chisos bluebonnet. This tallest of



© CONNIE THOMPSON

**Although not very common in Texas, Mexican poppies sometimes form pockets of sunny gold on the slopes of the Big Bend.**





© LAURENCE PARENT

**Giant dagger yuccas display enormous clusters of white blossoms that may weigh as much as 70 pounds and contain more than a thousand individual flowers.**

Texas' *Lupinus* species, also called the Big Bend bluebonnet, favors gravelly soils on slopes, and can grow to heights of four feet. Count yourself lucky to see them bloom en masse, a purple-blue mantle often speckled with the bright yellow of desert bailey. This highly variable winter annual requires ample fall and winter rains to germinate, grow, and blossom. No rain, no bluebonnets. While some natural phenomena, like Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park, perform with near clocklike precision, the seasonal uncertainty of Big Bend bluebonnets

and the area's other winter annuals makes their chance profusion all the more miraculous.

"The Big Bend is full of surprises," says David Long. "Plants that have been dormant for years will suddenly bloom after a rain shower." The seeds of desert annuals, for example, can remain dormant for five or six years, awaiting the right touch of rain at the right time. The gangly, often dead-looking ocotillo has another survival strategy: It sprouts bright-green leaves and scarlet blossoms after winter rains, only to shed its leaves when drought sets in again.

"Flowering plants are a very important part of desert ecology," adds David. "If you took away the flowering plants, you'd have no food for insects, birds, and other wildlife, and no means of pollination and propagation. You'd have nothing but barren terrain."

Flowering plants provide not only sustenance for wildlife but also food for thought. Gus Sánchez believes that the spring wildflower season is "a really significant time for people to come to Big Bend to interact with the ecosystem, because the spring blooms are a reminder of the cyclic nature of life and of how our own lives are ruled by these same natural cycles."

Wildflowers—like gorgeous sunsets, meteor showers, and majestic moun-



## Big Bend in Bloom

Lower fanciers touring Big Bend are pretty much on their own. The vast region is mostly *despoblado*, with more than a million acres of desert, canyon, and alpine wilderness preserved in two vast parks: Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park. Contact the park headquarters listed below for updates on weather and wildflower conditions.

Many of the paved national park roads, as well as FM 170 (known as the River Road) from Lajitas to Presidio, are favorable routes for wildflower displays. Ranger F. Gus Sánchez suggests that you “look for wildflowers off paved roads, where runoff makes ideal, moist conditions for flowering plants.”

Ranger David Long encourages park visitors to “explore canyons and arroyos. Wherever there is accumulation of moisture, you’ll find a greater variety of flowers,” he says.

*Collecting or destroying plants is prohibited in Big Bend’s national and state parks.*

**Big Bend National Park** (801,000 acres) can be reached via US 385 from Marathon, Texas 118 from Alpine, and FM 170 from Presidio. Water and gasoline are available at park headquarters, Panther Junction. Groceries and other supplies are available at stores in the Chisos Basin, Rio Grande Village, Castolon, and Panther Junction. Chisos Mountains Lodge in the Basin offers overnight lodging (call 915/477-2291 for reservations). Tent camping and RV sites avail-

able in the Basin, Rio Grande Village, and Castolon. Park entrance fee: \$10 per car, good for 7 days. Write to Supt., Big Bend National Park 79834; 915/477-2251. Web site: [www.nps.gov/bibe](http://www.nps.gov/bibe).

**Big Bend Ranch State Park** (287,000 acres) extends north and west of Big Bend National Park, along FM 170 and the Rio Grande between Lajitas and Presidio. The Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center in Lajitas (915/424-3327) is the park’s eastern gateway. Fort Leaton State Historical Park (915/229-3613), 4 miles east of Presidio, is the western gateway. Visitors can pay a daily entrance fee (\$3 per person) and daily activity fee (\$3 per person) and obtain permits at either gateway. Entrance fee waived for Texas Conservation Passport holders. Write to Supt., Box 2319, Presidio 79845 (915/229-3416). Web site: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

**The Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center**, named in honor of the late Dr. Barton Warnock, the dean of Big Bend botany, interprets five biological landscapes of the Chihuahuan Desert, as well as 570 million years of its geological history. The center features a new international interpretive exhibit (*Una Tierra—One Land*), a self-guided 2-acre botanical garden, a bookstore, a gift shop, and a research library. It will soon house Dr. Warnock’s herbarium of hundreds of desert



plants. The center sponsors classes and special events. Hours: Daily 8-4:30. Write to HC 70, Box 375, Terlingua 79852, or call the number listed previously.

For additional wildflower information, visit the **Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute**, 4 miles south of Fort Davis on Texas 118. The center offers a 20-acre arboretum, cactus greenhouse, gift shop, library, and access to the Modesta Canyon Trail. Hours: Mon-Fri 9-5 year round, Sat-Sun 9-6 (Apr. 1-Sep. 4, 2000). Admission: Free; donations accepted. Write to CDRI, Box 905, Fort Davis 79734; 915/364-2499. Web site: [www.cdri.org](http://www.cdri.org).

### Books

While botanists prefer the scientific precision of Latin names, most flower fanciers like the descriptive simplicity of common folk names. Sotol or “desert candle” is easier to say and remember than *Dasylistron leiophyllum*, and there are even times when “DYF” (damn yellow flower) is preferable

to *Perityle vaseyi*, a West Texas sunflower known as margined perityle. Nevertheless, a little basic knowledge of plant life can add to one’s viewing pleasure.

The following books, available at libraries and some bookstores, provide a good start: *Naturalist’s Big Bend* by Roland H. Wauer (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1992); *For All Seasons: A Big Bend Journal* by Roland H. Wauer (Univ. of Texas Press, 1997); *Cacti of Texas and Neighboring States: A Field Guide* by Del Weniger (Univ. of Texas Press, 1984); and *Medicinal Plants of the Desert and Canyon West* by Michael Moore (Museum of New Mexico Press, 1990). Of special note are two hard-to-find books by Barton H. Warnock: *Wildflowers of the Big Bend Country, Texas, and Wildflowers of the Davis Mountains and Marathon Basin*.

### Resources and Workshops

The **Big Bend Natural History Assn.** offers books, maps, workshops, and field trips. Write to BBNHA, Box 196, Big Bend National Park 79834; 915/477-2236. Web site: [www.bigbendbookstore.org](http://www.bigbendbookstore.org).

The **Big Bend Touring Society** offers natural history workshops. Write to Sam Richardson, Box 609, Terlingua 79852; 915/371-2548.

For information on wildflower and landscape photography workshops at **Big Bend Ranch State Park**, see aforementioned address and phone number, or call Jim Carr (713/486-8070) or Peggy Parks (512/398-7627).

tain vistas—inspire a sense of wonder. They have the power to bring people to their hands and knees—to photograph or smell a colorful, fragrant blossom, or, in the words of William Blake, to see “a heaven in a wild flower.” That heaven can be the microcosm of a brilliant pink pitaya cactus blossom, as intimate as a floral still life by Georgia O’Keeffe. Or it

can be the macrocosm of a desert panorama blanketed with Big Bend bluebonnets and embroidered by white-blooming yuccas.

Big Bend’s desert-dwelling wildflowers are studies in paradox: indomitable yet delicate, enduring yet ephemeral, extravagant yet necessary. Can you imagine the Big Bend palette without

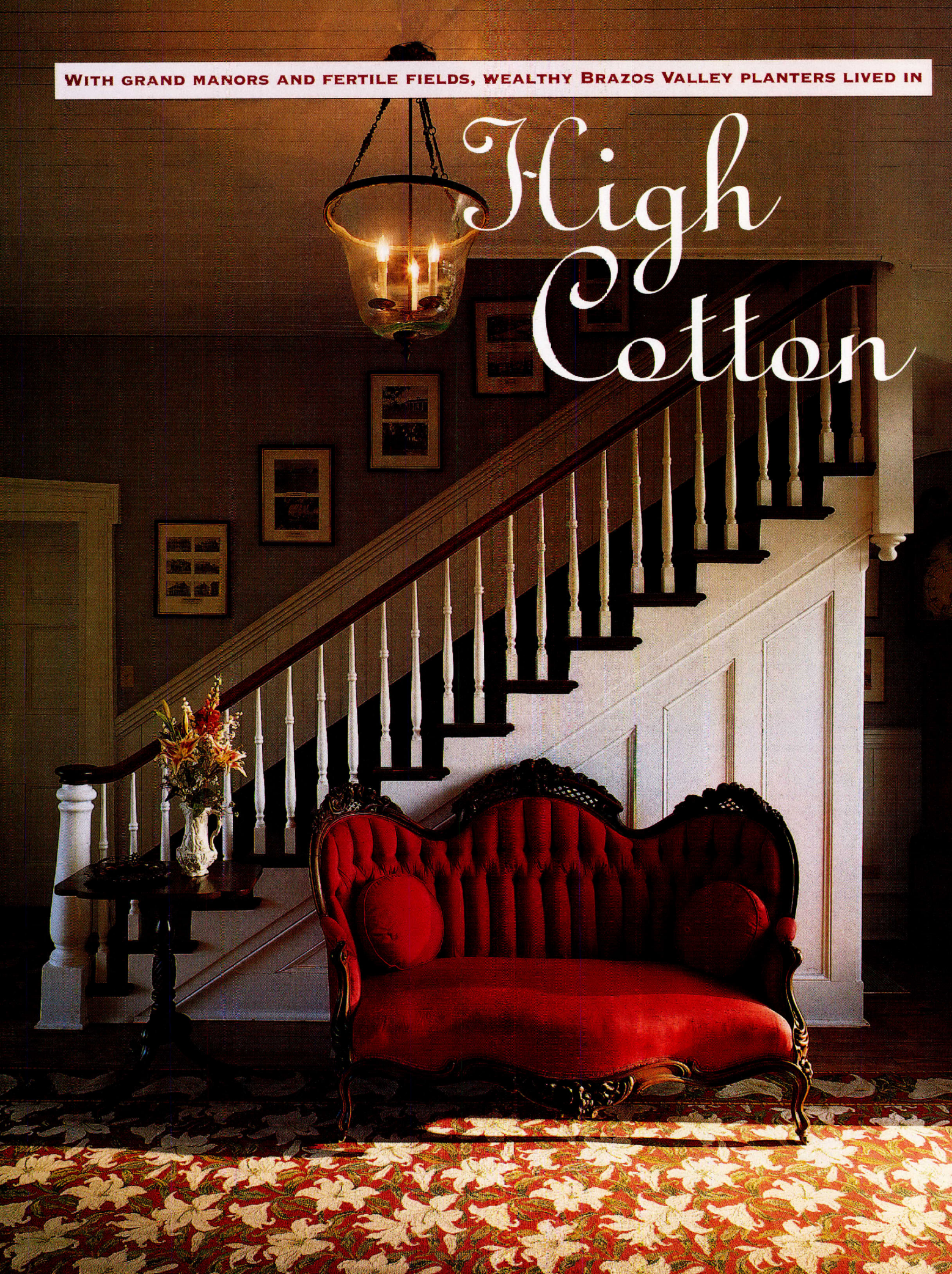
brilliant daubs of wildflowers? The sun-seared desert landscape would seem as empty and incomplete as the night sky devoid of stars or a passing cloudburst without a rainbow. ★

Longtime contributor DALE WEISMAN of Austin covered Big Bend Ranch State Park for the February 1997 issue of *Texas Highways*.



WITH GRAND MANORS AND FERTILE FIELDS, WEALTHY BRAZOS VALLEY PLANTERS LIVED IN

# High Cotton







BY CATHY STRALEY • PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. GRIFFIS SMITH

**J**ourney back to the beginnings of Texas' organized settlement—in 1821—when the first of Stephen F. Austin's "Old 300" colonists stepped off the schooner *Lively* at the mouth of the Brazos River. The colonists—some of whom were the younger sons of Southern planters who sought fertile farmland to call their own—brought along strong cultural ties to the Old South. From the 1820s to the 1830s, they laid claim to some of the richest land in Texas—the coastal plains and the blackland prairies of the Brazos River Valley—and soon adopted the Old South's plantation system.

To provide his colony with a central lifeline, Austin had chosen the Brazos as the natural transportation waterway for the new frontier. Named *Brazos de Dios* ("arms of god") by the Spanish, this important watercourse became the means for Texas settler migration, the movement of supplies, and the linking of inland agriculture with coastal markets.

"Many people seem to think that the cotton plantations, which started on the East Coast and spread westward, stopped short at the Texas border," says Stan Latham, museum director of the plantation-era Earle-Harrison House in Waco. "But many fortunes

and fine plantation homes were 'built by cotton' during Texas' plantation era, and these planters looked confidently forward to a great cotton future."

Most of Austin's "Old 300" received a league (4,428 acres), or a league plus a labor (4,605 acres), of land, for which they were to pay 12.5 cents per acre. More settlers soon arrived, and they, too, bought land. It took years of work during the 1820s, '30s, and '40s to develop these wilderness tracts into productive enterprises.

Slaves formed the backbone of these enterprises, and their numbers grew as cotton cultivation expanded. At the time of the Revolution in 1836, Texas had some 5,000 slaves. In 1850, the state counted more than 58,000 slaves, and by 1860, that number had grown to 182,566 slaves, owned by 21,878 slaveholders. Of these, fewer than 10 percent, or 2,163 slaveowners, had 20 or more slaves (the number taken to indicate planter status), and 54 individuals owned more than 100 slaves each.

Because of such assets and the fact that much of their food was grown on the plantations, the planters lived better than other people of their day. Most of the

[FACING PAGE] The Varner-Hogg Plantation house, named for its first and last owners, was built by its second owner, Columbus Patton, in the 1830s. Santa Anna was held here for a short time after the Battle of San Jacinto. [ABOVE] The Browning Plantation is in Chappell Hill, a town once known as the "Athens of Texas" for its institutions of higher learning. The Browning, built in 1857, offers bed-and-breakfast accommodations.



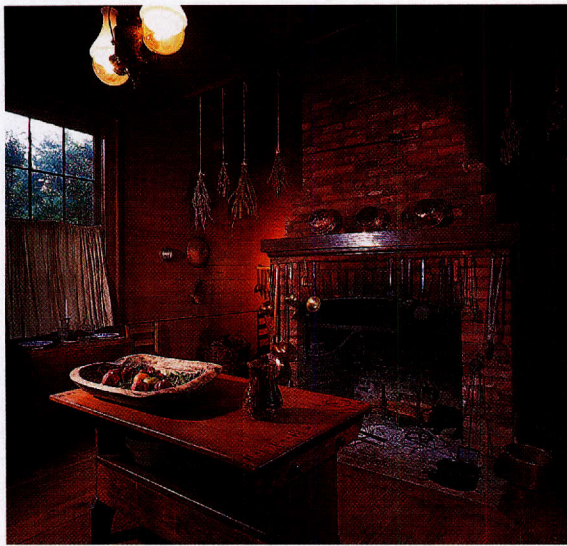
state's 2,000-plus plantations produced a mixture of cotton, sugarcane, rice, corn, cattle, and hogs. Half of them raised sheep, and more than three-fourths grew sweet potatoes. A few of the planters managed to amass homesteads of 10,000 to 50,000 acres. The planters tended to be commercial, political, and civic leaders of their communities, and their influence, in many cases, could be felt statewide. With achievement of prosperity, it didn't take long for their desire for comfort and prestige to spark a construction boom of large manor homes.

"As the number of cotton and sugar plantations in Texas grew, so did the ability of the planters to live more luxuriously," writes Elizabeth Silverthorne in her book *Plantation Life in Texas*. "More boats coming to haul away the plantation produce meant that those boats could bring lumber, factory-made bricks, marble, carriages, furniture, and all sorts of material comforts. Stores began to cater to the lifestyles that the planters' families were beginning to live."

Many early-Texas planters chose to build their homes in the Greek Revival architectural style, first seen in the East in the 1820s. "The Greek Revival became almost the symbol of the Old South," writes Blake Alexander in his book *Texas Homes of the Nineteenth Century*. "With the introduction of this style [in Texas] it was clear that civilization had caught up with the frontier."

### OLD KING COTTON

In the days of hand-picked cotton, a field laborer typically picked 200 to 300 pounds a day; a cotton wagon, which carted the raw bolls to the gin, held about 1,500 pounds. After the cotton was ginned to clean it and remove the seeds, that wagon-load of cotton produced one finished bale, which weighed 400 to 600 pounds. (Seeds, plant material, and dirt accounted for some two-thirds of the weight of the unginned cotton.) At one bale per acre—a common rule of thumb for early cotton production—Texas plantations produced from 400 to more than 1,000 ginned bales of cotton during each autumn harvest.



The detached kitchen of the Earle-Harrison House in Waco contains cooking implements that once belonged to Governor Pat Neff. The pitcher and goblets at right were fashioned from silver coins that physician Baylis Wood Earle refused to accept as payment for his services.



Characteristic Greek Revival features—simple, yet bold and grand—included a columned porch, classical moldings, symmetrical arrangement of rooms on either side of a central hall, and uniform alignment of windows on either side of the main entrance. Echoing another Old South tradition, elaborate and classically-designed gardens often graced the grounds.

Though large plantations thrived in the Old South for well over 100 years, Texas' period of prosperous plantations developed late and thus gave rise to fewer luxurious homes than in other states. Even so, several hundred such mansions were constructed in the central, east, and southeast regions of Texas during the 1840s and 1850s. By the early 20th Century, almost all of those on the Brazos frontier were gone, devastated by fires, hurricanes, post-Civil War economics, or neglect. Only a few remain today, most of them private residences. However, the following homes in the Brazos River Valley open their doors to the public, providing a genuine taste of this important Texas era.

## Earle-Harrison House

WACO

Constructed at the edge of the Texas frontier in 1858, this glorious, white Greek Revival mansion with its nine towering Doric columns showcases the refined tastes of its owners, physician Baylis Wood Earle and his wife, Eliza Harrison Earle. The Earles moved to the fertile Brazos Valley from a prosperous cotton plantation in Mississippi, dreaming of establishing a new cotton empire in Texas.

The home's temple-like facade rose imposingly amidst the primitive log cabins of the Waco prairie. The meticulously built mansion is believed to have been constructed by a Galveston shipwright who designed it in a fascinating way: By





**The tall front windows of the Earle-Harrison House open onto the porch. A common feature in antebellum mansions, the opened windows proved especially accommodating for the broad hoop skirts worn by women of the period.**

means of a two-story "hinge," discovered during restoration in 1968-70, the home was eventually to have been expanded to twice its size by allowing an exterior wall to swing outward. This would have completed the traditional symmetrical Greek Revival style. Even as a "half" structure, however, the mansion

was one of the finest of its day in Texas and among the first of the full-columned homes in the state.

Before the home was completed, though, Dr. Earle died. Some 13 years later, in 1872, Eliza sold the estate to her brother, General Thomas Harrison, who had served with distinction as a Confederate officer. A lawyer by training, Harrison became a judge after the war.

The home changed hands many times in later years. By 1967, it was in shambles and scheduled for demolition when a local philanthropist, Mrs. Nell Pape, and her close friend Lavonia "Bobbie" Jenkins Barnes rescued it and moved it to its current location. Lavonia, already well known for her restoration of several historic homes in the area, had long admired the Earle-Harrison House, and the G.H. Pape Foundation, which Nell had established to honor her late husband, international cotton magnate Gus Pape, provided the financial resources for its restoration. At the same time, Nell's love of gardening inspired the decision to establish the five-acre grounds as the lush Pape Botanical Gardens, a project that continues to develop.

The Earle-Harrison House and Pape Botanical Gardens operates today as a house-museum and garden. Visitors marvel at the home's features, which include tall plantation windows that roll up into the walls to provide ventilation and ample access to the veranda. Noteworthy among the decorative artworks throughout the house is an Earle family heirloom pitcher and goblet set fashioned from silver coins Dr. Earle refused to accept from a friend in payment for medical services. The large detached kitchen (a working kitchen today) displays a collection of tableware and cooking implements that once belonged to Texas governor Pat M. Neff.

Within the gardens, quiet pathways lead to plantings of annual and perennial foliage. Visitors find ever-changing color, beautiful magnolia trees, a double gazebo, and a romantic, 75-foot esplanade cascading with fragrant, multicolored roses.

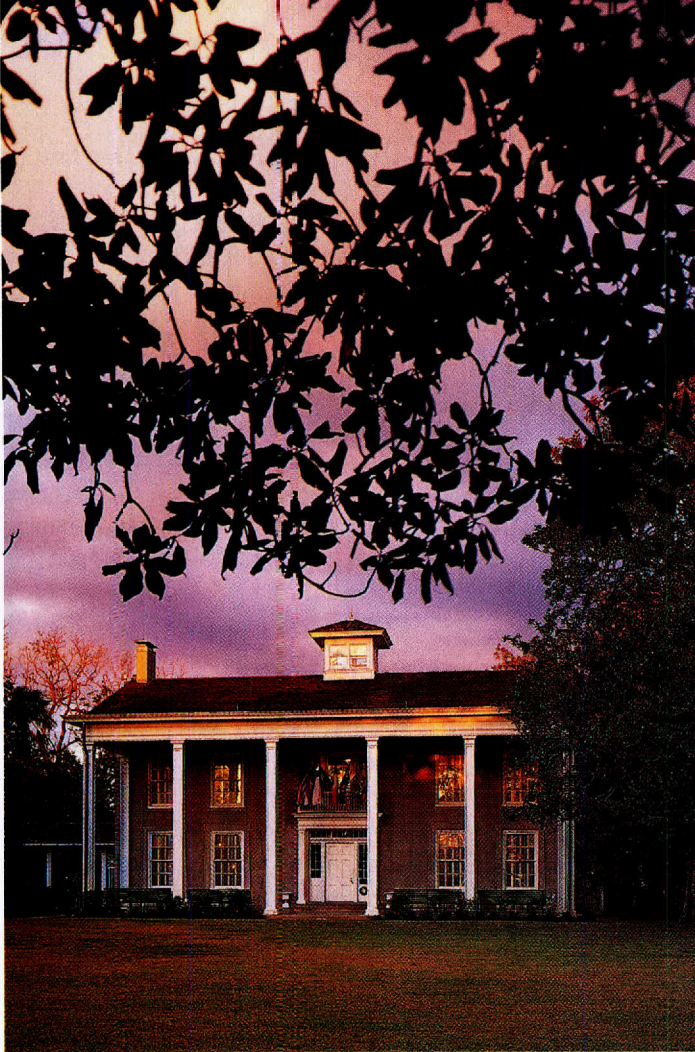
## *Varner-Hogg Plantation*

**WEST COLUMBIA**

**I**n a beautiful grove of oaks, magnolias, and pecans stands the impressive Varner-Hogg Plantation house, a stately home built in the 1830s by Columbus Patton, a Kentuckian. Patton presided for many years over the 4,500-acre sugarcane plantation, located on the old Martin Varner league, one of the first grants in Austin's "Old 300" colony. The acreage included a large sugar-processing house with double sets of kettles, slave cabins built of brick, a thoroughbred race-track and stable, and fine surrounding gardens.

Though the home sustained great damage in the hurricane of 1900, Texas Governor James S. Hogg bought the plantation the following year for a country home and retreat. Before his death (in 1906), Hogg encouraged his children to search for oil under the old sugarcane fields, and in 1917, drilling brought in the area's huge Columbia Oil Field.





**Philanthropist Ima Hogg, daughter of Governor James Hogg, furnished the family retreat as she wanted it before donating it to the state in 1956. Each room is dedicated to a different historical period.**



**A self-contained community, Liendo Plantation was built by the labor of more than 300 slaves. Renowned sculptor Elisabet Ney and her husband lived at Liendo from 1873 until 1911.**

An extensive remodeling of the home by Hogg's children in the 1920s altered the original Greek Revival structure to Colonial Revival style. Other changes included the creation of a new kitchen, an expansion of the dining room, and the addition of a six-column "Southern colonial" porch at the relocated front entrance. The gallery verandas at the rear of the house, which faces Varner Creek, remain true to the original style.

The governor's daughter, renowned philanthropist Ima Hogg, donated the reconditioned house and 66 acres to the state's park system in 1958 to establish Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historical Park. The donation included period china and kitchen implements, some of Ima's fine collection of Empire and Rococo Revival furnishings, and other elegant examples of the decorative arts from Texas' colonial period.

## *Liendo Plantation*

### HEMPSTEAD

Jared Groce, who came to Texas in 1821, was destined to become one of the most respected landowners of Austin's "Old 300." Groce, his family, and servants arrived with a caravan of 50 covered wagons, thoroughbred horses, an extensive trail of livestock, and many pontoons for ferrying their household goods across rivers along the way. Groce established Bernardo Plantation on 10 leagues of land. In 1825, he built the first cotton gin in Texas.

In 1841, Jared's oldest son, Leonard Waller Groce, who wanted to acquire his own lands along the Brazos, purchased 3,000 acres for \$1,500 through a tax-delinquency auction. As part of an original 67,000-acre Spanish grant to Mexican Justo Liendo, Leonard's acreage had already been maintained as a plantation for more than 20 years. Leonard had milled lumber and black Italian marble shipped from the East Coast for a grand manor house on his new Liendo Plantation; the materials then came by oxcart from Houston. Constructed in 1853 in the center of a live-oak grove, the generously scaled Greek Revival home became a renowned gathering spot, hosting many of Texas' early statesmen and historical figures. Major General John Wharton, Governor Sam Houston, and William H. Wharton, who later married Leonard's daughter, all socialized at Liendo.

After the Civil War began, Leonard, who served as a Confederate colonel, established a military recruitment and training center on Liendo's grounds. Called Camp Groce, it was used later as a prisoner-of-war camp. In 1865, during the federal occupation of Texas, Liendo's survival may have been secured by one of its more notable visitors—George Armstrong Custer. While stationed at Camp Groce, Custer and his wife resided in a simple military tent, but when Mrs. Custer became ill, the Groce family invited her to recover within their home. The Custers were so impressed with the Groces' hospitality and with the plantation itself that they made sure after the war that Liendo was not harmed.

Even so, the years of Reconstruction were not kind to



Liendo, and in 1873, the plantation was sold, to renowned sculptor Elisabet Ney, who had emigrated from Germany in 1871. Legend tells that upon arriving at Liendo for the first time, Elisabet walked onto the front balcony, threw out her arms, and exclaimed, "This is where I will live and die." For 38 years, she and her Scottish philosopher husband, Edmund Montgomery, called Liendo home.

Elisabet died in 1907, not at Liendo, but in her Austin studio. Dr. Montgomery died at Liendo in 1911. Both are buried on the plantation grounds.

In 1960, Carl and Phyllis Detering bought Liendo and began a 10-year restoration to return the home to its early glory. They traveled throughout the Deep South and Europe and brought back fine period furnishings and decorative artworks to grace the spacious rooms. Outstanding examples include a carved mahogany bedstead, a circa-1840 square rosewood Steinway pianoforte, and an early-1800s harp that once belonged to the British royal family.

## Colonel W.W. Browning Plantation CHAPPELL HILL

Established just west of the Brazos, on the rich farmlands of Washington County, Chappell Hill premiered as an important agricultural and educational center during the early years of Texas statehood.

Colonel William W. Browning, who owned more than 2,000 acres in the Chappell Hill area, prospered as a cotton grower in the 1850s and constructed a 6,000-square-foot Greek Revival manor house in 1857. The impressive frame dwelling was built of native cedar put together with pegs, notched joints, and square nails. Head of the board of trustees of the Chappell Hill Female College and associated with Chappell Hill's Soule University, Colonel Browning hosted frequent educational and social gatherings in the home. In *Sixty Years on the Brazos:*



Guests at the Browning Plantation bed-and-breakfast enjoy a breathtaking view from the rear veranda.

*The Life and Letters of Dr. John Washington Lockhart, 1824-1900,* a passage by Dr. Lockhart describes a year-end collegiate celebration at which Colonel Browning served "elegant roasted peacock and huge cakes seven and eight layers tall."

The plantation house's "widow's walk" provided the colonel a panoramic

view of his lands. A three-flight climb offers visitors today the same refreshing view of the rolling countryside. Tour guides relate how the home's artistic *faux bois* (literally, "false wood" in French) paneling—a frequent adornment of frontier mansions across the Old South—was created by hand-painting the doors, facings, and mantels to look like the grain of expensive woods. Other tour highlights include the broad rear veranda, 19th-Century plantation and tester beds, and a cedar log corncrib original to the grounds.

By the 1980s, the fine old house had fallen into extreme disrepair when Richard P. Ganchan of Houston purchased it and dedicated many years to its careful restoration. Already listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the home received a Texas Historical Commission medallion in 1983.

Waddy and Marilyn Wadkins, the owners since 1997, now offer bed-and-breakfast accommodations in the home. It's also available for weddings, special events, and tours.

## Fanthorp Inn ANDERSON

When Englishman Henry Fanthorp arrived in Texas in 1832 in search of a new life, he bought a quarter league of land for 25 cents an acre from Francis Holland, an "Old 300" settler, and on it raised cotton, corn, and livestock. About

### STEAMBOATIN' ON THE BRAZOS

The muddy Brazos River boasted both sidewheeler and sternwheeler steamboats for transport of bulky plantation cargoes—cotton pressed into bales and raw, processed sugar stored in hogshead barrels. To reach coastal markets at Houston, Galveston, and New Orleans, steamboats on the Brazos often required rainy-season floodwaters to maneuver the shoals, snags, and natural driftwood barriers (called rafts) along the river's more difficult sections. In good seasons, the Brazos was navigable for some 250 miles above its mouth at Velasco.

By the 1840s, shallow-draft steamboats were calling regularly at such plantation ports as Bell's Landing, Washington-on-the-Brazos, Warren, Groce's Landing, Bolivar, and Crosby's Landing. Since roads of the time were few and rough, transportation on the Brazos remained the preferred mode for shipping goods for some 50 years, especially for bulky loads.

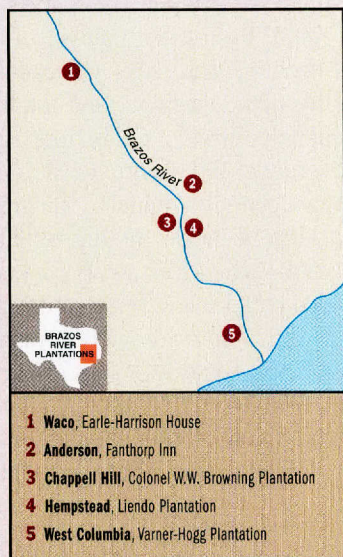
Before 1865, as many as 75 steamboats plied the Brazos' waters (to learn more about one of them, see *Speaking of Texas*, page 3). After the Civil War, as the state's railroad system grew, river trading declined, and many of the river communities fell into decay.



## Brazos River Plantations

**T**he **Earle-Harrison House and Pape Botanical Gardens** in Waco, administered by the G.H. Pape Foundation as a house-museum and garden, is just north of downtown, across from Cameron Park Zoo. Annual events include "Gardening on Fifth Street," an outdoor gardening market the 3rd weekend of Apr. (Apr. 15-16, 2000), the Bellmead Civil War Reenactment and Cotillion in mid-May (May 13, 2000), and Candlelight and Caroling (usually the 2nd Thu. of Dec., but Dec. 7, 2000), which includes caroling, refreshments, and tours of the home. The house is trimmed in Victorian finery beginning the first week of Dec. Hours: Tue-Fri 9:30-4, Sat 1:30-5, and by appt. Admission: \$2, free age 12 and younger. Gardens and 1st floor wheelchair accessible. Write to 1901 N. Fifth, Waco 76708; 254/753-2032.

**Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historical Park** at West Columbia offers public tours Sun 1-4, Wed-Sat 9-4 (closed noon-1 for lunch). Tours of the Interpretive Barn take place Sun 1-4. Admission: \$4, \$2 for students. Not wheelchair accessible. Picnic sites are available in the park. Varner-Hogg celebrates San Jacinto Day (Apr. 15, 2000) with educational programs, a living-history village, and tours of the plantation house. The park holds an annual Christmas program



the first Sat. in Dec. (Dec. 2, 2000). To reach the park, take N. 13th St. (FM 2852) for 2 miles northwest out of West Columbia. Write to Box 696, West Columbia 77486; 409/ 345-4656. Web site: www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

**Liendo Plantation**, just northeast of **Hempstead**, is a private residence, but it opens for tours the first Sat. of most months at 10, 11:30, and 1, and by special appt. It also opens during the annual Old South Festival, on the 3rd weekend of Apr. (Apr. 15-16, 2000; music, wagon rides, Civil War reenactors, frontier skills, quilt show, food, exhibits, lectures). To reach Liendo from the US 290

Loop, exit onto FM 1488 east, drive one mile, turn right onto Wyatt Chapel Rd., and drive three-tenths of a mile. Admission for home tours: \$7, \$5 age 65 and older, ages 7-12, and groups of 10 or more. First floor wheelchair accessible. Write to Liendo Plantation, Box 454, Hempstead 77445; 409/826-3126 or 877/468-6767.

The **Colonel W.W. Browning Plantation**, one mile south of **Chappell Hill's** business district, offers bed-and-breakfast accommodations in 4 rooms original to the home (\$125 per night; includes a tour) and a guest house (\$99; includes tour). Tours also provided by appt. (\$6 per person; group rates available). Not wheelchair accessible. Write to 9050 Browning St., Chappell Hill 77426; 409/836-6144 or 888/912-6144. Web site: www.browningplantation.com.

**Fanthorp Inn State Historical Park** is on Main St. in **Anderson**, 4 blocks south of the courthouse. The park has no overnight or dining facilities. A stagecoach replica is on permanent exhibit; rides (\$4, \$2.50 age 12 and younger) offered the second Sat. of each month. Hours: Fri-Sun 9-4. Admission: \$3, \$1.50 students, free age 5 and younger. Wheelchair accessible. Write to Box 296, Anderson 77830; 409/873-2633. Web site: www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

Texian Days—offering pioneer craft demonstrations, a parade,

arts and crafts, live entertainment, stagecoach rides, campfire cooking, a frontier-Texas Army encampment, and a home tour—takes place annually at the inn and downtown on the 4th Sat. in Sep. Contact the park for information on other annual events.

### Other Brazos Plantation Homes to Visit

*(Please call for hours, admission prices, and wheelchair accessibility.)*

**Seward Plantation** (ca. 1855), a charming manor home of the antebellum era in Independence, is currently undergoing restoration, but tours are available by special appt. and will be regularly offered to the public starting in March 2000. The large, impressive rooms are packed with family heirlooms, period furnishings, photo albums, hand-written plantation records, 19th-Century paintings and drawings, and original wallpapers. From the 3rd-floor veranda, you can imagine life on the 2,000-acre estate. The plantation retains several of its mid-1800s outbuildings, including a double-crib log barn, a blacksmith shed, slave quarters, and a corncrib. Hank Ward, the resident owner and restorer, is the great-great-grandson of the plantation's builder, John Hoblett Seward. John's parents, Samuel and Ann Elizabeth, arrived in Texas by covered wagon in 1832. Write to Hank Ward, 10005

1834, for his new bride, Rachel, Henry constructed a solid dogtrot home of half-dovetail notched cedar logs on one of the spread's high pine- and cedar-covered hills. Over the years, he expanded the house and added weatherboarding to cover the logs.

Henry had built his home at the juncture of two important stagecoach routes—the Nacogdoches-to-Austin and the Houston-to-Old Springfield—and he and Rachel began offering overnight accommodations for passengers. The house's rear, east ell formed the stagecoach inn and held a large dining room flanked by an outdoor kitchen; the west side housed the family.

The inn proved a favorite stopping place for travelers, and in the faded pages of Fanthorp Inn's guest register are the names of men who helped to shape the course of history: Robert E.



Fanthorp Inn, near Anderson, some 20 miles southeast of College Station, was a well-known hotel before and during the Republic of Texas era. It opened to the public as a state park in the 1980s.



E. FM 390, Independence 77833; 409/830-5388.

The **Dr. George Red House**, at Mariposa Ranch in Independence, was the home of Dr. George Clark Red, a physician, educator, and colonel in early Washington County. He began building this unusual Greek Revival home in the year of Texas' independence, 1836; some records show it was not complete until 1852. The large central fireplace and broad exterior steps rising to the upper level distinguish the home. Currently referred to as "The Independence House," it has been relocated on FM 390 to become part of Mariposa Ranch's collection of 6 historic buildings that offer bed-and-breakfast accommodations. Two suites in the Red House rent for \$140 each a night. Write to Johnna and Charles Chamberlain, 8904 Mariposa Lane, Brenham 77833; 409/836-4737 or 877/647-4774. Web site: [www.mariposaranch.com](http://www.mariposaranch.com).

#### **Plantation Exhibits at Brazos River Museums**

(Please call for hours, admission prices, and wheelchair accessibility.)

**Brazoria County Historical Museum** in Angleton offers a definitive Austin Colony Exhibit on Colonial Texas (1821-1836), including map plats of the "Old 300" colony's original plantation sites and corresponding colonists' names. Records of plantation

homes, histories, journals, and genealogical research are available. Write to 100 E. Cedar/Courthouse Square, Angleton 77515; 409/864-1208. Web site: [www.bchm.org](http://www.bchm.org).

**Lake Jackson Historical Museum**, located in the town built on the site of Abner Jackson's vast antebellum plantation, offers fine exhibits and artifacts from local plantations. Among other things, visitors learn about life in the mid-1800s and see a display of Abner's ghost-like image on his mansion's front porch. Kids can reconstruct the manor with blocks, then press the "hurricane" button to reenact its destruction by the great hurricane of 1900. An archeological excavation at the plantation site can be toured the first Sat. of each month. Write to Box 242, Lake Jackson 77566; 409/297-1570. Web site: [www.lakejacksonmuseum.org](http://www.lakejacksonmuseum.org).

**Columbia Historical Museum** in West Columbia provides an entire room dedicated to early East Columbia, the bustling Brazos port originally called Bell's Landing and now designated as a National Historic Landmark area. Sited on the very edge of a bluff above the river, East Columbia—only a quaint hamlet today—boasts 3 plantation-era homes from its waterfront trading days. Write to 247 E. Brazos Ave., West Columbia 77486; 409/345-6125.

The **Chappell Hill Historical Society Museum** presents the 1847-67 period with displays on the region's plantation life, cotton, and agriculture, as well as its participation in the Civil War and Reconstruction. Pick up a walking/driving tour map of historic Chappell Hill homes at the museum, located in the old Chappell Hill School. Write to Box 211, Chappell Hill 77426; 409/836-6033. Web site: [www.alpha1.net/~ebentley/](http://www.alpha1.net/~ebentley/).

**Fort Bend Museum** in Richmond offers exhibits on Stephen F. Austin's colonization of Texas, sugarcane and cotton farming, area plantations, the Civil War period, and historic river steamboats. Also enjoy living history and sites at the museum's George Ranch Historical Park, 8 miles south of Richmond on FM 762. Write to 500 Houston, Richmond 77469; 281/342-6478 or 343-0218. Web site: [www.fortbendmuseum.org](http://www.fortbendmuseum.org).

**Stephen F. Austin State Park** in San Felipe features the original San Felipe de Austin settlement, the social, economic, and political capital of the Texas colonies from 1824 to 1836. The park, northeast of Sealy on the Brazos River (about 3 miles north of I-10), is on the site where Austin brought the first 297 colonizing families. View historic sites and exhibits of relics at the ca.-1847 J.J. Josey General Store Museum. The park also offers hiking, fishing,

golf, picnicking, and camping. Write to Box 125, San Felipe 77473; 409/885-3613. Web site: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

#### **Books**

For more information on early homes and lifestyles along the Brazos River and throughout Texas, look for these books in your library or bookstore: *Plantation Life in Texas* by Elizabeth Silverthorne (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1986); *Texas Homes of the Nineteenth Century* by Drury B. Alexander (Univ. of Texas Press, 1966); *Early Homes of Waco and The People Who Lived in Them* by Lavonia Jenkins Barnes (Texian Press, 1970); *The Old Plantations and Their Owners of Brazoria County Texas* by Abner J. Strobel (Union Natl. Bank/ Houston, 1926); *Historic Homes of Washington County, 1821-1860* by Betty Plummer (Rio Fresco Books, 1971); *Sandbars and Sternwheelers: Steam Navigation on the Brazos* by Pamela A. Puryear and Nath Winfield, Jr. (Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1976); *Stagecoach Inns of Texas* by Kathryn Turner Carter (Eakin Press, 1994); *Sixty Years on the Brazos: The Life and Letters of Dr. John Washington Lockhart, 1824-1900*, edited by Jonnie Wallis (Argonaut Press, 1966); and *From Can See to Can't: Texas Cotton Farmers on the Southern Prairies* by Thad Sitton and Dan K. Utley (Univ. of Texas Press, 1997).

Lee, Sam Houston, Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, and Anson Jones. In 1845, the last vice president of the Republic of Texas, Kenneth L. Anderson, died at the inn on his way home from a legislative session in Washington-on-the-Brazos and was buried in the Fanthorp Cemetery. When area citizens chose Fanthorp's (as the community was known) as the county seat, Henry donated land for the courthouse and was instrumental in renaming the town for the vice president.

Six generations of Fanthorp descendants occupied the home. In 1977, the State of Texas acquired the inn and grounds and carefully restored them to an 1850s authenticity. The site became Fanthorp Inn State Historical Park. Visitors gain a real sense of yesteryear touring the inn, and a ride in the park's stagecoach adds to the feeling of a genuine frontier experience.

The few remaining plantation homes in Texas stand as elegant, if poignant, reminders of an era that lasted only a few decades in the state and was soon gone with the winds of war and emancipation. As Elizabeth Silverthorne notes in *Plantation Life in Texas*, "the costs of the war and the freeing of the slaves...bankrupted the plantation system. When the confusion of Reconstruction had passed, former masters and freedmen had to find new ways to coexist in a world that would never be the same." ★

CATHY STRALEY of Dallas is editor/publisher of *Festivals of Texas*, a bimonthly travel publication.

J. GRIFFIS SMITH photographed last month's stories on Judge Roy Bean and the Light Crust Doughboys.





# The Critics' Choice



It's no secret that Texas harbors a rich history of mighty fine cooking. We all know there's fabulous food out there, but where exactly? At the editors' behest, I embarked on a statewide quest for restaurants that really push the envelope with great food. And not just great food, mind you, but food that sets the synapses firing, food that crystallizes an otherwise ordinary moment, food that's transcendent. A tall order? I didn't think so.

By Susan Kirr  
Photographs by J. Griffis Smith

To begin my quest, I went straight to the cognoscenti: restaurant critics and food writers in Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio. These experts are in the vanguard—out in the field, boldly testing the waters so that the rest of us will know where to hightail it, what to avoid. They step out to all the new hotspots, check up on the old standbys, and keep a sharp eye out for cool dives.

I wasn't too concerned with having them recommend the "best" restaurants in each town, because you can't dine on filet mignon and lobster every night of the week. Instead, I wanted *favorites*, because favorites are more interesting. They call up not only good food, but something about the place that makes it out-of-the-ordinary, something that earns it a tender spot in your heart. Something that draws you back.

Dale Rice, the restaurant critic for the *Austin American-Statesman*, pondered the idea of "favorites" for awhile, before settling on this definition: "Favorites [to me] means places I go back to over and over and over again, where I'm never disappointed, where I'm always pleased, places where I go with friends or





If eating out is one of your favorite pastimes, have we got some tips for you. Savor the roasted sea bass on braised leeks (facing page, top left) at *Le Rêve* in San Antonio, bask in the sunny interior of *Café Express* (facing page, bottom) in Dallas, and sample gorditas and other Tex-Mex delights prepared by owner/cook Lourdes Pearson (above) at the *Little Diner*, just outside El Paso.

where I take family.” He adds, “I like to have a really high comfort level with the food, with the service, and with the atmosphere.” These, I agree, are excellent criteria for favorite haunts.

Not too surprisingly, restaurants dishing up Mexican food, barbecue, and home-style cooking ranked high among our experts’ choices. And truly, where would Texas grub be without this sublime triumvirate? Other faves show just how far Texas cuisine has come. These days, you can find Southwestern food all over the map in Texas, just as you can across the nation. And so-called cowboy cuisine is rapidly gaining a foothold, as the

popularity of the *Reata* restaurants in Alpine and Fort Worth proves. French food, the grande dame of fine cuisine, got two mentions from our critics: at *Si Bon* in Austin and *Le Rêve* in San Antonio. And in keeping with national trends, restaurants that showcase healthy, fresh ingredients also garnered attention. *Dream Café* in Dallas takes vegetarian dishes way out of the ordinary, while *Eastside Café* in Austin harvests fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs from its very own backyard garden.

So, what are we waiting for? Bon appétit! Or in Texas-talk, Chow down, cowpoke!



## Amarillo

Cindy Lee, a food writer for the *Amarillo Globe-News*, has seen a lot of fancy restaurants come and go in Amarillo. In an attempt to avoid the latest flash in the saucepan, Cindy focused on the local stalwarts. One of her favorites is **Country Pride**, a restaurant she describes as “a down-home kind of place” that’s been around for some 40 years. The friendly waitresses don’t even carry menus around, because most folks already know what they want. Country Pride specializes in Tex-Mex and chicken-fried steak, and portions are enormous (“one enchilada fills up the average person, and the CFS covers a platter”), so Cindy suggests packing a large appetite.

The **Village Bakery Café**, which makes almost everything from scratch, from but-tery croissants and French bread to cream

puffs and *tiramisu*, is also on Cindy’s list. The lunch and dinner menus feature a different hot entrée each day, like rosemary rotisserie chicken or spicy meatloaf, but one of Cindy’s favorites for lunch is chicken or egg salad on a fresh croissant or marbled rye bread. The bakery uses left-over French bread in a sumptuous bread pudding studded with currants and served with a lemon or vanilla sauce. Many of the offerings vary seasonally: Summer yields fresh berry tarts, while in autumn, pumpkin cake and gingerbread send comforting scents throughout the bakery. In December, Greek baklava, Jewish challah bread, and German stollen celebrate international holiday traditions.

While in Amarillo, you gotta go for barbecue at some point. Cindy says, simply, “Give us beef,” and for this Texas staple she chose **Cattle Call**, a restaurant with a homey, informal feel, where folks can’t help but get comfy. Here, slow-

smoked barbecued ribs, chicken, beef, and sausage team up with potato salad, cole slaw, and beans—all the usual suspects, but cooked with flair. For example, when you ask owner David Wilson about the cole slaw dressing, he says, “If I told you what was in our secret recipe, I’d have to sign you up for the witness protection plan and move you to Montana.”

## Austin

Restaurant critic Dale Rice settled on **Castle Hill Cafe** without a moment’s hesitation. Opened in 1986, Castle Hill was one of the first restaurants in Austin to offer Southwestern cuisine. It continues to explore Southwestern influences, but the chef here also likes Mediterranean, interior Mexican, and Asian flavors. Dale says, “It’s consistently one of the most reliable restaurants in town. Year in, year out, I can go there and count on being served something good, like rigatoni pasta and garlic-grilled shrimp or chicken-and-pork dumplings.” By varying the menu every two weeks, chef/owner David Dailey continues to surprise diners. Dale also appreciates the intimate setting, richly decorated with Mexican folk art, and he lauds Castle Hill’s servers as some of the best in the city.

Dale also singled out **Si Bon**, a new French restaurant in Austin. “I think I like Si Bon so much because it intrigues me. I never know what fascinating combination of ingredients I’m going to find when I walk in the door. It all depends on what inspired chef/owner Peter O’Brien that day,” says Dale. Dale recommends the *menu dégustation*, a six-course tasting menu, which can be paired with wines and champagnes, that varies daily. A typical offering could include caviar Bellini; brioche stuffed with lobster, tomatoes, and fennel; chanterelle mushroom-risotto cakes; beef Wellington; duck breast over pear-and-ginger brûlée; and mango soufflé. Inspiration, indeed.

For a perennial favorite, Dale chooses **Eastside Café**. The restaurant, which operates in a cozy 1920s wood-frame house, has reaped accolades for its lush,

MICHAEL A. MURPHY



Whether you’re looking for a quick lunch or a leisurely dinner, Amarillo residents know you can’t go wrong at the Village Bakery Café. As its name implies, the restaurant specializes in fresh-baked breads and desserts. If you’d like to sample one of its signature dishes at home, see the bread pudding recipe on the facing page.



## Breast of Pheasant Grand-mère

*Rotisserie for Beef and Bird in Houston often pairs this elegant entrée with wild rice. This version is adapted from a recipe that appears in Houston Is Cooking 2000 by Ann Criswell (Houston Gourmet, 1999). Preparation involves flambéing, so be sure to use a skillet without a nonstick finish.*

- 2 (3-lb.) pheasants
- 1 tsp. salt
- dash of freshly ground pepper
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
- ½ c. flour
- ½ c. unsalted butter
- 8 slices lean bacon, coarsely cut
- 12 large white button mushrooms, quartered
- ¼ c. brandy
- 1 c. dry white wine
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled, boiled, and diced
- ½ c. pearl onions, boiled and stemmed
- roasted sweet peppers (optional)
- chopped fresh parsley (optional)
- fresh rosemary sprig (optional)

Remove pheasant breasts by cutting with a sharp knife along breastbone to wing bone; save remainder for another use. Sprinkle breasts with salt, pepper, and chopped rosemary, and dust lightly with flour. Melt butter in a heavy skillet (one without a nonstick finish), and sauté breasts over low heat for 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove breasts, reserving drippings, and place in a shallow baking dish; set aside.

Sauté bacon and mushrooms in same skillet until bacon is cooked but not crisp. Add brandy, and flambé, lighting carefully with a taper match from a safe distance. Stir in wine, potatoes, and onions, and spoon over pheasants. Bake in a 350° oven for 10-15 minutes, or until pheasants are done. Garnish with roasted peppers, parsley, and rosemary sprig. Yield: 4 servings.

*Note: For a lower-fat dish, remove skin from breasts, reduce butter to ¼ c., and use only 4 slices of bacon.*



Try your hand at making one of the Village Bakery Café's most popular desserts—Bread Pudding with Lemon Sauce (above, left). Adventurous cooks can tackle Breast of Pheasant Grand-mère, served at Houston's Rotisserie for Beef and Bird.

## Bread Pudding with Lemon Sauce

*Many diners at the Village Bakery Café in Amarillo make it a point to save room for this finale.*

- 1 lb. day-old French bread, cubed
- 1 qt. whole milk, scalded
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 2 c. sugar
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ c. butter, melted
- 2 T. pure vanilla
- ½ c. heavy cream
- 1 c. currants
- 1 c. pecan halves

Combine bread and milk in a greased 3-qt. baking dish, and set aside. Combine eggs, sugar, cinnamon, butter, and vanilla, and beat well. Blend in cream, and stir in currants and pecans. Combine with bread mixture. Bake at 350° for about 45 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature with Lemon Sauce. Yield: 10-12 servings.

## LEMON SAUCE

- 1 c. sugar
- ¼ c. cornstarch
- dash of salt
- 2 c. milk
- 4 egg yolks
- ⅓ c. lemon juice
- 3 T. butter

Combine dry ingredients in a heavy saucepan. Gradually add milk, stirring until blended. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens and comes to a boil; remove from heat, and set aside.

Beat egg yolks until thick in a medium bowl. Gradually stir one-fourth of hot mixture into yolks; add back to remaining hot mixture, stirring constantly for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in lemon juice and butter. Cover top of pan with plastic wrap or waxed paper. Cool. Thin with heavy cream, if desired.



backyard organic garden, a peaceful oasis where gardeners nurture vegetables and herbs with loving care. The cafe's eclectic chalkboard specials of soups, salads, and entrées change according to what's in season. A warm, cheerful atmosphere inside and a sunny outdoor patio make enjoying the fruits of each season that much more pleasant.

And speaking of fruit, Dale particularly enjoys Eastside's strawberry-orange soup. Some of his other favorites include the sesame catfish and the salad of mixed field greens. The latter often includes young, tender lettuce from the garden tossed with other greens, almonds, pecans, and green apples, and topped with a raspberry vinaigrette and warm, breaded goat cheese.

## Dallas

Dallas often serves as the state's testing ground for new chains and concepts, so much so that it's sometimes difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. *The Dallas Morning News'* part-time restaurant critic, Teresa Gubbins, however, had no trouble isolating a few gems.

Teresa singled out **Dream Café** for several reasons. The cafe is renowned locally for its breakfasts and also earns kudos for its rich seasonings and creative vegetarian dishes, like garden stir-fry with tofu and roasted corn cakes. "They do unusual combinations—their Mystic Pasta, for example, combines chicken, brie, caramelized onions, and bacon—and they aren't outrageously expensive," says Teresa. She also likes the cafe's decor, which merges a funky slanted floor with high ceilings, lots of windows, and abundant al fresco dining. The relaxed service meets customers' needs but doesn't make people feel rushed.

Despite the presence of lots of frou-frou eateries, Teresa believes the home-cookin' arena is where Dallas-area restaurants really distinguish themselves from those in other Texas regions. "The one that reaches a peak of excellence is Babe's," she says. **Babe's Chicken Dinner House** in Garland original-



Grilled salmon with jalapeño-lime pesto, framed by Swiss chard leaves, makes an appearance in the backyard garden of Austin's Eastside Café. The cafe's organically grown vegetables and herbs play a major role in the menu.

ly served only fried chicken and chicken-fried steak, but about a year ago the restaurant added smoked chicken, ribs, and pot roast ("the best pot roast I've ever had," says Teresa). The green beans are "perhaps too soft, but delicious," fresh corn gets shaved right off the ear and then creamed ("it's like tasting the earth"), and fresh biscuits can be drowned in Texas honey or sorghum syrup. "The home-style cooking we have in this part of the country is really worth cherishing," adds Teresa.

**Cafe Express**, a chain that originated in Houston, also gets raves from Teresa. She considers it a great dining solution for harried city-dwellers. "It's so practical and so urban," she says. Cafe Express scores well on food, too, serving up

familiar dishes like soups, salads, pasta, and burgers prepared with panache. The vegetarian chef's salad, for example, goes beyond the everyday by adding fresh watercress and pistachios to salad greens and other ingredients. The cafe also features a self-serve bar of toppings for salad or pasta, such as top-grade olives, cornichons, capers, and other exotic condiments.

## El Paso

Michael Nosenzo, a freelance restaurant critic for the *El Paso Times* and a private chef, as well, states up-front that most of his favorite places are "holes in the wall." But what glorious holes!





El Paso restaurant critic and private chef Michael Nosenzo juggles an oversize pepper grinder outside one of his favorite eateries, the L&J Cafe. The cafe is known for its jalapeño salsa, which Michael refers to as The Green Death.



The Southwest chicken salad—along with knockout breakfasts and creative vegetarian dishes—draws diners to Dream Café in Dallas.

Michael loves the **Little Diner** in Canutillo, just outside El Paso, for its legendary gorditas, the best he has ever eaten. These “little fat ones” are light as

a feather, tender-crisp, and stuffed almost to bursting with beef or chili con carne. “I’d pick the gorditas for my last supper,” Michael says, “because eating them is as close to a religious experience as I’ve ever had.”

**Taco Santa Cecilia**, in El Paso proper, has earned fame for its trio of table salsas—red chili, green chili, and pico de gallo—all of which seem “heaven-sent” to Michael. He finds the fresh corn tortillas unbelievably tender, with true corn flavor permeating every morsel. Michael likes the restaurant’s rotisserie, mounted in a crackling, wood-burning oven in the front of the dining area. It not only sends streams of tantalizing scents into the air but also roasts succulent pork for the house specialty—tacos, of course.

Another of Michael’s favorites and an El Paso institution since 1927, the **L&J Cafe** stands next to the historic Concordia Cemetery, where John Wesley Hardin allegedly found his final resting place. The cemetery provides a fitting background for what Michael calls

“The Green Death,” a house specialty. “The Green Death is a jalapeño salsa that will cure what ails you, if it doesn’t kill you first. Sort of a ‘chemo-salsa-

therapy,” Michael says with a grin. “The chicken enchiladas—stuffed with chicken and cheese and covered with the perfect green chili sauce—are a particular favorite of mine, absolutely the best in a city that is inundated with them,” he adds. “They’re quintessential border food, and I don’t believe they’re done quite the same anywhere else.”

## Fort Worth

When a little cowboy restaurant named **Reata** opened in Alpine in 1993, the distance (for most of us anyway) presented something of a challenge. Then a second one opened in Fort Worth, and at press time, a third one was expected to open in Beverly Hills, California, in early 2000. *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* restaurant critic June Naylor Rodriguez praises Reata and its executive chef, Grady Spears. “He does Texas food in a real fun way, and I think that’s exciting, because for a long time Texas food was considered not very interesting,” June says. “He does everything with such flair and such excitement in terms of the flavors, the herbs, the chilies.” She cites the cilantro-jalapeño soup (“terribly rich but delicious”), the poblano relleno (“stuffed with smoked chicken”), and the tenderloin tamale (“out of this world”) as examples. “Grady has helped raise the standard for Texas food,” she adds. In addition to overseeing the restaurants, Grady recently cowrote a cookbook, *A Cowboy in the Kitchen*, and he has a cooking show in the works for PBS.

**Jubilee Cafe** also gets high marks from June. She describes it as “a little glorified coffee shop with really good home cooking.” Simple pleasures like a bowl of pinto beans with cornbread can send diners into fits of ecstasy. “A 1996 *Star-Telegram* poll rated the CFS as the best in Fort Worth,” says June, “and they also make excellent German pancakes, which are very popular.” Spectacular fried chicken, freshly baked pies (10 to 15 pies of assorted kinds made daily), and super-friendly waitresses also help make this cafe a standout.





## Jalapeño Beef Stew with Polenta Stars

*The Reata (in Alpine and Fort Worth) uses Polenta Stars to dress up one of its specials, Jalapeño Beef Stew. This version is adapted from recipes that appear in A Cowboy in the Kitchen by Grady Spears, Robb Walsh, and John Westerdahl (Ten Speed Press, 1998).*

- 6 whole shallots
  - 1 T. olive oil
  - 5 T. unsalted butter
  - 1 lb. beef chuck, cut into 1-in. cubes
  - ½ c. flour
  - 3-4 jalapeños, seeded and minced
  - 2 carrots, peeled and cut into 2-in. pieces
  - 1 large potato, peeled and cut into 2-in. pieces
  - ½ red onion, peeled and diced
  - 1 c. port
  - 2 c. beef stock (fresh or canned)
  - 1 T. rubbed sage
  - 1 T. dried oregano
  - 2 tsp. kosher salt
  - 1 tsp. freshly ground pepper
- Toss shallots with olive oil, and roast in a 350° oven for 35 minutes, or until soft and brown. Set aside.
- Heat butter in a large, deep saucepan over medium heat. Toss beef with flour to coat, and place in hot butter. Increase heat, and sauté for 5-10 minutes. (Don't crowd the meat.) Remove pan from heat, and transfer meat to a bowl, reserving drippings; cover meat loosely with aluminum foil, and set aside.

Sauté jalapeños, carrots, potato, and red onion in drippings over medium heat, tossing to prevent burning, until onion turns translucent. Stir in wine, beef stock, sage, and oregano. Cook over low heat, with lid slightly ajar, for 30-40 minutes. Stir in reserved beef-shallots mixture, and continue cooking for 30 more minutes, or until meat and vegetables are done. Season with salt and pepper. Ladle stew into bowls, and top with 2 or 3 Polenta Stars. Serve hot. Yield: 4 servings.

## POLENTA STARS

- 1 T. olive oil
- ¾ c. minced red onion (about ½ onion)
- 1 c. minced shallots
- 8 scallions without tops, thinly sliced
- 3 c. water
- 3 c. milk
- 2 tsp. dried thyme leaves
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. freshly ground pepper
- ¼ c. unsalted butter
- 1 ½ c. quick-cooking polenta
- 1 c. grated Asiago or Parmesan cheese

Heat oil in a large, deep saucepan. Add onion, shallots, and scallions, and sauté over medium heat about 5 minutes, or until wilted. Stir in next 6 ingredients; bring mixture to a boil, and then lower heat to simmer. Pour polenta in with one hand while whisking with the other. After polenta is whisked in, stir with a long-handled wooden spoon for 10-15 minutes, or until mixture is thickened and liquid is absorbed. Reduce heat if necessary. Remove saucepan from heat, and stir in cheese. Spread polenta evenly in a buttered 9x13 metal pan, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate at least an hour.

At serving time, cut polenta into stars or other shapes, and bake in a 350° oven for 10-15 minutes. (Stars may also be heated by pan sautéing, grilling, or microwaving.) Serve hot. Yield: Enough stars for two recipes of Jalapeño Beef Stew, or 4-6 servings if used as a side dish.

Another of June's picks, **Joe T. Garcia's Mexican Restaurant** boasts a near-mythic status in Fort Worth. In business since the 1930s, the restaurant has gradually grown to cover almost two city blocks. With several expansive dining spaces, gorgeous outdoor patios, and a shimmering pool, the place draws throngs of people throughout the week. With lines around the block, Joe T.'s can afford its one little quirk: The evening menu lists only two items—a Mexican dinner (enchiladas, tacos, rice, beans, and nachos) and fajitas. Whichever you choose, June guarantees you won't be sorry. "They also serve legendary margaritas," she says, "limey, but not too sweet."

## Houston

Ann Criswell knows food, having worked as the food editor at the *Houston Chronicle* for 33 years. Her wide-ranging experience, not to mention Houston's varied, first-rate dining scene, made singling out just three restaurants a little difficult for her. "I hope I'm not going to forget something that I really like," she mused.

**Brennan's**, the famed New Orleans eatery, operates a branch in Houston that specializes in Creole cooking with a Texas twist. For example, barbecued shrimp pairs off with jalapeño-corn



Executive chef Carl Walker of Brennan's in Houston enjoys talking about the fine points of the menu with diners at the chef's table in the restaurant's kitchen.



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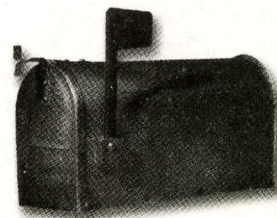
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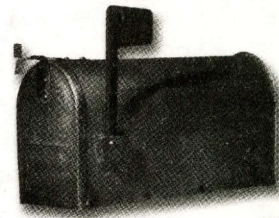
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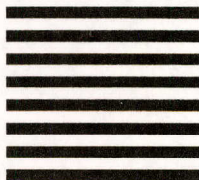


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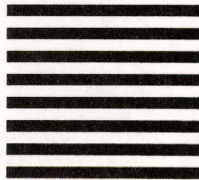
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pudding, and crab cakes get dressed up with a jalapeño-flavored *beurre blanc* (a rich sauce made with white wine, cream, butter, and shallots). The owners redesigned the space about a year ago, and Ann finds the new “chef’s table” in the kitchen a fabulous place to dine. (The table seats four to 10, and the chef decides the menu, which includes six to seven courses.)

**Rotisserie for Beef and Bird**, an inventive restaurant with a focus on Texas regional cooking, also made Ann’s cut. “It’s classic, and yet it’s very creative,” she says. She praises owner and chef Joe Mannke for his attention to detail, his use of fresh, regional ingredients, and his stellar wine list. Joe also seals his reputation with his unusual preparation of wild game dishes (he serves wild boar chops with plum sauce, for example) and “one of the best tortilla soups to be had in Houston,” in Ann’s opinion.

Ann also chose **Tony Ruppe’s**, a restaurant that made a big splash when it opened in Houston in December 1998. *My Table*, Houston’s dining magazine, named Tony Ruppe’s as the best new restaurant of 1999, and *Gourmet* also singled it out. Chef Tony Ruppe draws from European, Japanese, Thai, and Mexican cooking, among other cuisines, and he enjoys experimenting with unusual ingredients. He likes to describe his restaurant as true American food—a melting pot of different cultures. Ann says he’s famous for his avocado fries—fresh green avocado wedges rolled in coarse, crunchy breadcrumbs, then fried and served with a spicy habanero-flavored ketchup. She’s also partial to his grilled lamb chops, which are laid over a savory, mushroom-filled bread pudding in a red wine sauce.

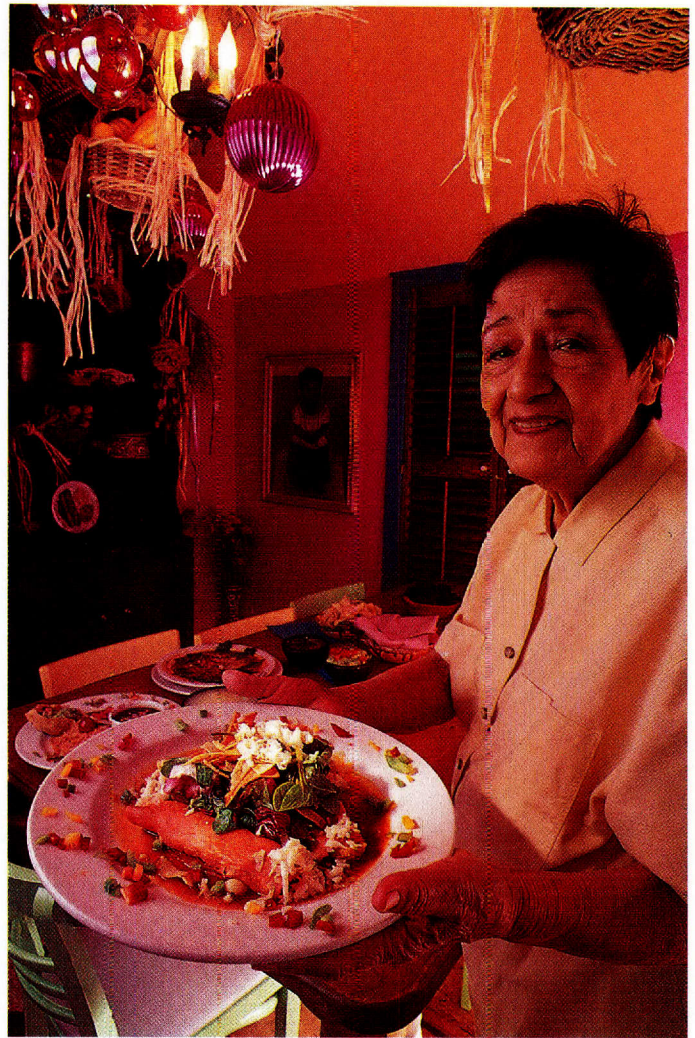
## San Antonio

John Griffin, dining editor for the *San Antonio Express-News*, found that **Le Rêve** immediately came to mind when making his picks. He describes the restaurant as modern French with some traditional accents. John especially enjoys the

food-and-wine pairings, such as a paté de foie gras made with raisins and served with a nice Sauterne. He loves the restaurant’s locale, perched over the San Antonio River (its balcony overlooks the River Walk), and its “clean, uncluttered, elegant” look: white walls, white linens, and white dishes set off by bold splashes of color in the art on the walls and fresh flowers.

An American bistro named **Silo Elevated Cuisine** also earns high marks from John. The restaurant is situated on the floor above Farm to Market, a specialty foods and produce shop. The market ambience, combined with a bustling, open kitchen, gives the feel of dining in a lively European bistro. Chef Mark Bliss cooks in a style dubbed “contemporary American,” with splashes of Asian, French, and Continental cuisines tossed in. John especially admires Mark’s inspired way with comfort food, for example, scrambled eggs graced with truffle oil. “He turns this dish into something really decadent,” notes John.

In San Antonio, Mexican food rules, so John also picked **El Mirador**, which he describes as “Tex-Mex with the emphasis on the Mex.” El Mirador won him over with a single dish, a traditional Mexican *caldo* (soup) that he considers the best in the city: *xochiltl*, a chicken broth virtually exploding with citrus flavors and crunchy vegetables.



Mary Treviño, whose family started El Mirador in San Antonio more than three decades ago, displays a plate of potato enchiladas. Mary is famous for the tantalizing soups she prepares each week.

Great food, great restaurants—Texas boasts an abundance of both. And while this list of favorites is utterly subjective, it does represent an extensive sampling of the distinctive cooking our state has to offer. Creative chefs are truly rampant here, serving up delicious dishes that diners can savor across the state, city by city, bite by bite. ★

Austin filmmaker and freelance writer SUSAN KIRR wrote our December story on Georgetown. She’s currently producing a documentary about bicycle culture in Austin.

Versatile staff photographer J. GRIFFIS SMITH crisscrossed the state to cover the restaurants and food writers featured in this story. Griff’s work also appears in the Brazos River Valley plantations story on page 34.



## Food Writers' Top Picks

If your taste buds are tingling and you'd like to try one of these eateries, here's some information to get you started. We advise calling ahead to make reservations (if they're accepted), and to confirm restaurant hours before driving a long distance.

### Amarillo

**Country Pride** is at 5909 Wineinger Rd. Hours: Mon-Sat 11-8. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$6. Reservations accepted Mon-Thu. Call 806/373-3592.

The **Village Bakery Café** is at 2606 W. 22nd St. Hours: Mon-Sat 7 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$10. No reservations. Call 806/358-1358.

**Cattle Call** is in the Westgate Mall, at Coulter and I-40. Hours: Mon-Thu 11-9, Fri-Sat 11-9:30, Sun 11-6. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$8. No reservations. Call 806/353-1227 or 800/658-6097.

### Austin

**Castle Hill Café** is at 1101 W. 5th St. Hours: Lunch Mon-Fri 11-2:30, dinner Mon-Sat 6-10. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$18. Reservations accepted for parties of 6 or more. Call 512/476-0728.

**Si Bon** is at 801 S. Lamar Blvd. Hours: Lunch Tue-Fri 11:30-2, dinner daily 6-11. Reservations recommended. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$45. Call 512/326-8323.

**Eastside Café** is at 2113 Manor Rd. Hours: Mon-Thu 11-10, Fri 11-11, Sat 10 a.m.-11 p.m., Sun 10-10. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$12-\$15. Reservations accepted. Call 512/476-5858.

### Dallas Area

**Dream Café** is at 2800 Routh St. Hours: Sun-Thu 7 a.m.-10 p.m., Fri-Sat 7 a.m.-11 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$18. Reservations accepted for dinner only. Call 214/954-0486.

**Babe's Chicken Dinner House** is at 1456 Belt Line Rd. in Garland. Hours: Tue-Sat 5 p.m.-9 p.m., Sun 11-3. Wheelchair accessible. Average

price for dinner: \$7.50. No reservations. Call 972/496-1041.

**Cafe Express** has 3 locations in Dallas: 3230 McKinney Ave. (214/999-9444), 5600 W. Lovers Lane (214/352-2211), and 4101 Beltline Rd. (972/991-9444). Hours: Daily 11-11. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$8. No reservations.

### El Paso

The **Little Diner** is in Canutillo, at 7209 7th St. Hours: Thu-Tue 11-8. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$7. No reservations. Call 915/877-2176.

**Taco Santa Cecilia** is at 5500 El Paso Dr. Hours: Daily 8 a.m.-11 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$8.50. No reservations. Call 915/772-3435.

**L&J Café** is at 3622 E. Missouri St. Hours: Mon-Fri 11-8, Sat 11-6. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$8. Reservations accepted. Call 915/566-8418.

### Fort Worth

**Reata** is in the Bank One building, at 500 Throckmorton St., Ste. 3500. Hours: Lunch daily 11-2:30, dinner daily 5-10:30. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$25. Reservations accepted for dinner and for large groups at lunch. Call 817/336-1009. (For information on the Alpine location, call 915/837-9232.)

**Jubilee Café** is at 2736 W. Seventh St. Hours: Daily 6 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for lunch: \$7. Reservations accepted for parties of 10 or more only. Call 817/332-4568.

**Joe T. Garcia's Mexican Restaurant** is at 2201 N. Commerce St. Hours: Mon-Thu 11-2:30 and 5-10, Fri-Sat 11-11, Sun 1 p.m.-10 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$10. Reservations accepted for parties of 20 or more. No credit cards. Call 817/626-4356.

### Houston

**Brennan's of Houston** is at 3300 Smith St. Hours: Lunch Mon-Fri 11:30-1:30, dinner Mon-Sun 5:45-9:30, brunch Sat 11-1:30 and Sun 10-1:30. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for



Joe T. Garcia's Mexican Restaurant lists only two items on its evening menu—a Mexican dinner and fajitas—but Fort Worth restaurant critic June Naylor Rodriguez (above) recommends both.

dinner: \$50. (The chef's table costs \$65 per person, seats 4-10, and the chef decides the menu, which consists of 6-7 courses.) Reservations accepted. Call 713/522-9711.

**Rotisserie for Beef and Bird** is at 2200 Wilcrest Dr. Hours: Lunch Mon-Fri 11:30-2, dinner Mon-Sat 6-10. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$25. Reservations accepted. Call 713/977-9524. Web site: www.rotisserie-beef-bird.com.

**Tony Ruppe's** is at 3939 Montrose Blvd. Hours: Lunch Mon-Fri 11-2, dinner Mon-Thu 5:30-10 and Fri-Sat 5:30-11. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$28. Reservations recommended, especially on weekends. Call 713/852-0852.

### San Antonio

**Le Réve** is at 152 E. Pecan St. Hours: Tue-Sat 5 p.m.-11 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$50. Reservations required. Call 210/212-2221.

**Silo Elevated Cuisine** is at 1133 Austin Hwy. Hours: Lunch

Mon-Sat 11:30-2, dinner Mon-Thu 5:30-10 and Fri-Sat 5:30-11. Wheelchair accessible. Average price for dinner: \$30. Reservations recommended for dinner, and accepted for lunch for parties of 5 or more. Call 210/824-8686.

**El Mirador** is at 722 S. St. Mary's St. Hours: Mon 6:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Tue-Thu 6:30 a.m.-9 p.m., Fri-Sat 6:30 a.m.-10 p.m., Sun 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Wheelchair accessible, but access to restrooms is somewhat limited (narrow entrance). Average price for dinner: \$10-\$15. Reservations accepted. Call 210/225-9444.

### Resources

In most parts of the state, your best bet for restaurant coverage remains the food pages of the local newspaper. For lively coverage of Houston's dining scene, look for the monthly magazine *My Table*, available in Houston at many newsstands and bookstores. Write to 9337 Katy Fwy., #271, Houston 77024; fax 713/468-0651. Web site: www.my-table.com. Email: mytable@aol.com.



March 2000						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

In Fun Forecast, we provide events and telephone numbers for next month, so that you'll have additional time to plan your outings.

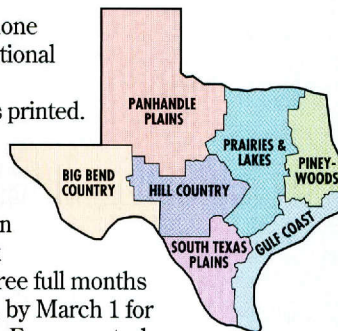
Sometimes dates change after the magazine is printed.

Before you drive miles to an event, confirm the date by calling the number listed next to the festivity or by contacting the local chamber of commerce. If you wish to submit an event for Fun

Forecast, please send the information to Fun Forecast, *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009; fax 512/486-5879. Submit information at least three full months before the first of the month in which the event will take place (for example, by March 1 for June festivities). Space is limited, so we may not be able to print every event. For a quarterly, more detailed schedule of events, write for a free *Texas Events Calendar*, Box 149249, Austin 78714-9249, or fax 512/486-5944.

*Texas Highways'* Web site ([www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com)) includes an expanded Fun Forecast that gives descriptions of the events.

For free routing assistance or details on any destination in Texas, call 800/452-9292 toll-free from anywhere in the United States and Canada, any day between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Central Time. A travel counselor at one of the state's travel information centers will be on the line to provide travel information, send brochures, and advise you of any emergency road conditions.



## Panhandle Plains

2-4, 9-11, 16-18

**ABILENE**  
*Nonsense*  
915/673-7082

3  
**SAN ANGELO**  
Cactus Hotel  
Jazz Series  
915/653-6793

3-5, 31-Apr 2  
**POST**  
Old Mill  
Trade Days  
806/495-3529

4  
**ABILENE**  
Philharmonic Ball  
915/677-6710 or  
800/460-0610  
**WICHITA FALLS**  
*The Circus Parade*  
940/692-5005

4-5  
**BIG SPRING**  
Gem & Mineral  
Show  
915/263-4662

4-12  
**SAN ANGELO**  
Stock Show  
& Rodeo  
915/653-7785

5  
**LUBBOCK**  
Youth Symphony  
806/775-2243

7  
**WICHITA FALLS**  
Taste of the Town  
940/322-8686

7-10  
**LUBBOCK**  
1776  
806/770-2000

9-10  
**WICHITA FALLS**  
*The Marriage of Figaro*  
940/397-4399

10-12  
**LUBBOCK**  
Home & Garden  
Show  
806/775-2243

**MINERAL WELLS**  
Palo Pinto Co  
Livestock Show  
& Fair  
800/252-MWTF

11  
**ABILENE**  
"100th Anniversary  
of Broadway"  
915/677-6710 or  
800/460-0610

**BIG SPRING**  
"Sing Big Spring"  
915/264-7223

**JACKSBORO**  
Jack Co Jamboree  
940/567-3506

17-19  
**SHAMROCK**  
St Patrick's  
Celebration  
806/256-2501

18  
**HASKELL**  
VFD Car Show  
940/864-3694  
or 864-2023

**SPUR**  
Downtown  
Trade Days  
806/271-3363

18-19  
**ABILENE**  
Texas  
Treasure Show  
2000  
903/843-5555

**COLORADO CITY**  
Railhead  
Trade Days  
915/728-3403

**LUBBOCK**  
Coin Show  
806/775-2243

23  
**BIG SPRING**  
Ag Expo  
915/263-7641

24  
**CLAUDE**  
Community  
Heritage Theatre  
Production  
806/226-5409

25  
**ABILENE**  
Philharmonic  
915/677-6710 or  
800/460-0610

**WICHITA FALLS**  
Cattle Barons Ball  
940/691-7201

25-26  
**JACKSBORO**  
Trade Days  
940/567-2602

**WICHITA FALLS**  
Arts & Crafts  
Festival  
915/263-7690

26-28  
**MINERAL WELLS**  
Antique Auto  
Swap Meet  
940/325-9354

30-Apr 1  
**ABILENE**  
*All the Way Home*  
915/674-2739

**LUBBOCK**  
Rodeo  
806/770-2000

## Prairies and Lakes

1  
**DENTON**  
UNT One O'Clock  
Lab Band  
940/369-7802  
or 565-2930

1-5  
**DALLAS**  
Tri-Delta Charity  
Antiques Show  
214/939-2700

1-31  
**BRENHAM**  
Bluebonnet Trails/  
Wildflower Tours  
409/836-3695 or  
888/273-6426

2  
**SEGUIN**  
Toast to Texas  
800/580-7322

2-4  
**GLEN ROSE**  
Somervell Co  
PRCA Rodeo  
254/897-4509  
or 897-3081

2-18  
**ADDISON**  
*Barefoot in the Park*  
214/544-1407 or  
888/649-8499

2, 10, 13,  
17, 27, 31  
**DALLAS**  
Arts & Letters Live  
214/922-1220  
or 922-1219

2-Apr 9  
**ARLINGTON**  
*How to Succeed in  
Business Without  
Really Trying*  
817/261-9628

3  
**DENTON**  
Alexandria's  
Ragtime Band  
940/898-2091  
or 898-2500

3-4  
**ARLINGTON**  
*Princess & the Pea*  
817/861-2287

**RICHARDSON**  
International  
Coin Show  
254/799-4344

3-5  
**ARLINGTON**  
Arts & Crafts Show  
903/786-2523 or  
817/459-5000

**CANTON**  
Old Mill  
Marketplace  
903/567-5445

**DALLAS**  
Home & Garden  
Show  
214/665-6181 or  
800/654-1480

3-26  
**GRANBURY**  
*On Golden Pond*  
817/573-9191  
or 572-0881

4  
**BELLVILLE**  
Market Day  
409/865-3407

**DALLAS**  
Aquarium  
Family Fun Day  
214/942-3678

**DENTON**  
Redbud Festival  
940/349-8537 or  
972/991-3871

**GREENVILLE**  
Bluegrass/  
Gospel Music  
Review  
903/454-1430

**HALLETTVILLE**  
State  
Championship  
Domino  
Tournament  
512/798-2662

**MEXIA**  
Western Days  
Barbecue Cookoff  
254/562-5751

**SULPHUR SPRINGS**  
Lawn & Garden  
Show  
903/885-8071

4-5  
**BELTON**  
Sami Arts & Crafts  
Affaire  
512/441-7139 or  
888/441-7133

**CLEBURNE**  
Depression &  
Elegant  
Glass Show  
972/780-0193

**DALLAS**  
Irish Fest  
214/821-4174

4-5  
**GRAPEVINE**  
Woodcarvers Show  
817/656-0855

**SULPHUR SPRINGS**  
Cutting Horse  
Show  
903/885-8071

**WACO**  
Ceramic Show  
254/857-3288  
or 753-2578

**WASHINGTON**  
Texas  
Independence Day  
Celebration  
409/836-3695 or  
888/273-6426

4, 11, 18, 25  
**STEPHENVILLE**  
Cross Timbers  
Country Opry  
254/965-4132

5  
**SEALY**  
Polka Fest  
409/885-6786

6  
**DENTON**  
UNT  
Chamber  
Orchestra  
940/369-7802  
or 565-2930

**FORT WORTH**  
The Canadian  
Brass  
888/597-7827

7-10  
**WACO**  
Black History  
Month  
Activities  
254/756-0933

**FORT WORTH**  
Dolly Johnson  
Antique Show  
254/622-2858

8  
**FORT WORTH**  
Les Ballets  
Troadero de  
Monte Carlo  
888/597-7827

9-11  
**SULPHUR SPRINGS**  
Rodeo  
903/885-8071

9-12  
**IRVING**  
Steel Guitar  
Jamboree  
972/285-1251 or  
888/208-9709

10  
**IRVING**  
"Dallas Divas"  
972/554-8534  
or 252-2787

10-12  
**ARLINGTON**  
Country Peddler  
Craft Show  
817/459-5000

**CANTON**  
Auto Swap Meet  
254/734-3194 or  
800/229-2314

10-25  
**IRVING**  
*A Streetcar  
Named Desire*  
972/252-2787

11  
**DALLAS**  
St Patrick's Day  
Parade  
214/368-6722

**IRVING**  
Dr Pepper  
Collectibles  
214/520-5777

**LEWISVILLE**  
Highland Games  
972/219-3400

**RICHARDSON**  
Symphony  
Orchestra  
972/234-4195

**ROUND TOP**  
Symposium & Tour  
409/278-3530

**SEGUIN**  
Teatro de Artes  
de Juan Seguin  
Noche Gala  
800/580-7322

11-12  
**BRENHAM**  
Second Weekend  
on the Square  
979/277-0913 or  
888/273-6426

**FORT WORTH**  
Dolly Johnson  
Antique Show  
254/622-2858

11-12  
**GLEN ROSE**  
Longhorn Show  
254/897-3081

**GRAPEVINE**  
Glass Show  
817/275-6342  
or 410-3459

11-Apr 16  
**DALLAS**  
Dallas Blooms  
214/327-8263

12  
**DALLAS**  
Downtown Dallas  
St Patrick's Day  
Parade  
972/991-6705  
or 699-5691

**GLEN ROSE**  
Bike the Rim  
254/897-3081

14  
**YOAKUM**  
Country Music USA  
512/293-2309

14-19  
**DALLAS**  
*Fame*  
214/691-7200

15  
**FORT WORTH**  
Frank Patterson,  
Irish Tenor  
888/597-7827

15-18  
**CLEBURNE**  
Johnson Co  
Livestock Show  
817/645-8861

16  
**GRANBURY**  
Gospel Concert  
817/572-0881 or  
800/354-1870

16-18  
**DUBLIN**  
St Patrick's Day  
Festival  
254/445-3422

**RICHARDSON**  
African Violet  
Show  
972/278-0389

16-19  
**WACO**  
Square Dance  
Roundup  
817/831-1419  
or 485-8665

17  
**FORT WORTH**  
Cowtown Goes  
Green  
817/626-7921



17 <b>WACO</b> Kathy Mattea 254/752-9797 or 800/701-2787	22 <b>DALLAS</b> Literary Cafe 214/922-1219 or 922-1220	25 <b>CALVERT</b> Art of Texas Festival 979/364-3730	27-Apr 1 <b>DECATUR</b> Wise Co Youth Fair 940/627-3341	4 <b>TYLER</b> St Gregory Fun Run 903/592-8572	18, 25 <b>WOODVILLE</b> Tyler Co Dogwood Festival 409/283-2632	2-5 <b>PORT ARTHUR</b> Mardi Gras of Southeast Texas 409/721-8717 or 800/235-7822	5 <b>ORANGE</b> Robert Bluestone, Classical Guitar 409/886-5535 or 800/886-5535	17-19 <b>GALVESTON</b> Home & Garden Show 409/744-7848
17-19 <b>FORT WORTH</b> <i>Madame Butterfly</i> 817/731-0200	<b>DENTON</b> UNT Symphony 940/565-2930 or 369-7802	<b>DENISON</b> Art & Wine Renaissance 903/464-4452	28 <b>DENTON</b> UNT Canticum Novum 940/369-7802 or 565-2930	4-5 <b>LONGVIEW</b> Train Show 903/297-6330	21 <b>LUFKIN</b> Taste of Lufkin 936/633-0277	2-5, 10-12 <b>HARLINGEN</b> <i>Man of La Mancha</i> 956/412-7529	6 <b>HARLINGEN</b> "Spirit of the Dance" 956/430-6699	<b>HOUSTON</b> Postcard Show 281/933-3557
<b>McKINNEY</b> Trade Days 972/562-5466	<b>GREENVILLE</b> Greenville Day (150th) 903/450-4544	<b>ENNIS</b> Arts & Crafts Festival 972/875-2463	29-31 <b>DALLAS</b> Car Show 214/939-2700	10 <b>CONROE</b> "Dance Through Time" 936/441-2787	<b>TYLER</b> Taste of Tyler 903/534-5154	3-4 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> St Patrick's Day Festival 361/883-9662	7 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> The Canadian Brass 361/888-6520	18 <b>BAY CITY</b> Agriculture Market Day 979/245-8333
<b>PLANO</b> Sci-Fi Show 972/578-0213	23 <b>GATESVILLE</b> Community Showcase 254/865-2617	<b>IRVING</b> Music of Kurt Weill 972/580-1566	Disney on Ice 214/939-2800	11 <b>BUNA</b> Redbud Festival 409/994-3882	24-25 <b>TYLER</b> Antique Show 903/592-2028	<b>PORT ARANSAS</b> Tackle & Boat Show 361/749-6839	<b>SAN BENITO</b> Jack Schultz Orchestra 956/399-5125	<b>ROCKPORT</b> A Celebration of Ranching Heritage in Aransas County 361/729-0386
<b>WACO</b> State Garden Show 254/722-1270	23-25 <b>CAMERON</b> Festival Cameron 254/697-4979	<b>ROUND TOP</b> Drew Lang Marimba Concert 409/249-3086	30 <b>BEDFORD</b> Tumbleweed Smith at Quarterly Notes 817/952-2290	11 <b>KIRBYVILLE</b> Country Music Show 409/423-5744	24-26 <b>TYLER</b> Arts & Crafts Show 903/531-1212	<b>PORT ARANSAS</b> Tackle & Boat Show 361/749-6839	3-5 <b>KINGSVILLE</b> Texas Cactus Festival 800/333-5032	18-19 <b>PORT ARTHUR</b> Antique Collectible Show 409/985-8801
17-19, 24-26 31-Apr 2 <b>PALESTINE</b> Dogwood Trails Festival 903/723-3014 or 800/659-3484	23-26 <b>DALLAS</b> Video Festival 214/999-8999	<b>SAN FELIPE</b> Colonial Texas Heritage Festival 409/885-3222	30 <b>DENTON</b> UNT Symphony 940/369-7802 or 565-2930	11 <b>MINEOLA</b> Star Select Opry 800/646-3652	24-Apr 9 <b>TYLER</b> Azalea & Spring Flower Trail 903/592-1661 or 800/235-5712	3-5 <b>HOUSTON</b> Masquerade Ball 956/399-5800	9-12 <b>BROWNSVILLE</b> International Art Show 956/542-0941	19 <b>GALVESTON</b> Symphony 409/765-1894 or 800/821-1894
18 <b>ROUND TOP</b> Festival Hill Herbal Forum 409/249-5283	23-26 <b>DALLAS</b> Pancake Day 903/885-8071	<b>SULPHUR SPRINGS</b> Kiwanis 903/885-8071	30-31 <b>GLEN ROSE</b> Bluegrass Jamboree 254/897-3081	13-18 <b>TEXARKANA</b> Strange Family Bluegrass 903/791-0342 or 792-2481	24-Apr 9 <b>TYLER</b> Azalea & Spring Flower Trail 903/592-1661 or 800/235-5712	9-12 <b>BAY CITY</b> Matagorda Co Fair & Rodeo 409/245-2454	21-26 <b>VICTORIA</b> Livestock Show 361/576-4300	21-26 <b>HOUSTON</b> Fame 713/981-7668
18-19 <b>BELLVILLE</b> Antique Show 409/865-5618	<b>FORT WORTH</b> Texas Storytelling Festival 940/387-8336 or 972/991-8871	<b>WACO</b> Fiesta 254/754-7111	30-Apr 3 <b>FORT WORTH</b> NASCAR Auto Racing 817/215-8500	16 <b>LUFKIN</b> Reading Railroad at the Texas Forestry Museum 936/632-9535	31 <b>MOUNT PLEASANT</b> Colleen Mallette, Cabaret Songs 903/572-3644	9, 11-12, 17-19 <b>HOUSTON</b> <i>Cleopatra</i> 713/227-2787 or 800/828-2787	10-11 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>Cinderella</i> 409/892-7093	23 <b>HOUSTON</b> Heritage Festival 409/722-0279
<b>CELBURNE</b> General Pat Cleburne Birthday Celebration 817/558-6370	24 <b>DENTON</b> UNT A Cappella Choir 940/369-7802 or 565-2930	25-26 <b>DALLAS</b> Guitar Show & Musicfest 972/260-4201	31-Apr 2 <b>FORT WORTH</b> Symphony 817/665-6000	16-18 <b>JACKSONVILLE</b> Jr Livestock Show 903/586-2217	31-Apr 2 <b>MOUNT PLEASANT</b> Farm, Home, & Garden Show 903/572-8567	4 <b>ALVIN</b> Fish Fry 281/331-2054 or 331-4461	11 <b>PORT ARTHUR</b> Taste of Gumbo 409/985-8801	23 <b>HOUSTON</b> Waffle Breakfast 956/748-2112
<b>GRANBURY</b> Hood Co Jr Livestock Show & Fair 817/573-2655	<b>SEGUIN</b> Texas Lutheran University Band 800/580-7322	<b>HALLETTSVILLE</b> Polka & Sausage Fest 512/798-2311	31-Apr 2 <b>WEATHERFORD</b> Trade Days 817/594-3801 or 598-4351	17 <b>TYLER</b> Glen Campbell 903/566-7424	31-Apr 8 <b>HUNTSVILLE</b> Walker Co Fair 409/291-8763	<b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>The Great Cross-Country Race</i> 409/880-2250	<b>CRystal BEACH</b> Mardi Gras Parade 409/684-5940	24-25 <b>KINGSVILLE</b> TAMU-Kingsville Jazz Festival 361/593-2806
<b>ROUND TOP</b> Winedale Spring Festival 409/278-3530	24-25 <b>ARLINGTON</b> Texas Indian Market & Southwest Showcase 806/355-1610 or 817/459-5000	<b>PALESTINE</b> Garden Club Flower Show 903/723-8876 or 723-5174	31-Apr 23 <b>GRANBURY</b> <i>The Odd Couple</i> 817/573-9191 or 572-0881	17-18 <b>COLDSRING</b> Chili Cookoff 936/653-2184	<b>Gulf Coast</b>	4 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>The Great Cross-Country Race</i> 409/880-2250	<b>NEDERLAND</b> Big Game Banquet 409/727-7689	24-26 <b>BEAUMONT</b> Rod Run 409/892-8192
18-20 <b>KAUFMAN</b> Kaufman Co Fair 972/932-3118	24-26 <b>SEGUIN</b> Antique Car Rally 800/580-7322	<b>WACO</b> Coin & Stamp Show 254/776-6655	31-Apr 23 <b>GRANBURY</b> <i>The Odd Couple</i> 817/573-9191 or 572-0881	17-19 <b>LIVINGSTON</b> Trade Days 409/327-3656	<b>Pinewoods</b>	4-5 <b>BROWNSVILLE</b> CAF Air Fiesta 956/541-8585	<b>NEDERLAND</b> Big Game Banquet 409/727-7689	24-26 <b>BEAUMONT</b> Rod Run 409/892-8192
<b>SEGUIN</b> Quarter Horse Show 800/580-7322	24-26 <b>SEGUIN</b> Antique Car Rally 800/580-7322	<b>GRAND PRAIRIE</b> Low Rider Show 972/647-2331	2 <b>HUNTSVILLE</b> Sam Houston's Birthday 409/294-1832	TYLER Trade Days 903/595-2223	<b>HOUSTON</b> (began Feb 18) Livestock Show & Rodeo 713/791-9000	11 <b>PORT ARTHUR</b> Boat Show 409/722-0865	<b>CRystal BEACH</b> Mardi Gras Parade 409/684-5940	24-26 <b>BEAUMONT</b> Rod Run 409/892-8192
18-26 <b>DALLAS</b> Spring Training at Fair Park's Age of Steam Railroad Museum 214/428-0101	25 <b>ARLINGTON</b> Collectorfest 214/227-0100	26, 30 <b>DALLAS</b> "Bach & the Chapel Royal" 214/320-8700	3 <b>TEXARKANA</b> "Spirit of the Dance" 903/792-4992	17-26 <b>CONROE</b> Montgomery Co Fair 936/760-3247	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-5, 11-12 <b>HOUSTON</b> River Oaks Garden Club Azalea Trail 713/523-2483	<b>NEDERLAND</b> Big Game Banquet 409/727-7689	24-26 <b>BEAUMONT</b> Rod Run 409/892-8192
19 <b>MOULTON</b> Polka/Waltz Festival 512/596-7609	<b>BELTON</b> Western Swing Showcase 254/939-8390	27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
21 <b>PLANO</b> Real Time Computer Show 972/422-0296	<b>BRENHAM</b> Blue Bell Fun Run 979/277-6595	27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
	<b>BRYAN</b> Cattle Barons Ball 409/778-9463	27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
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		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664	15 <b>CORPUS CHRISTI</b> <i>The Barber of Seville</i> 361/883-6683	25 <b>LAKE JACKSON</b> Brazosport Symphony 409/265-7731
		27 <b>CELBURNE</b> Kelly Miller Circus 817/645-2455	3-5 <b>JEFFERSON</b> Mardi Gras Upriver 903/665-3811	18 <b>GILMER</b> Upshur Co Health Fair 903/843-2413	1-7 <b>GALVESTON</b> (began Feb 25) Mardi Gras! Galveston 409/763-4311 or 888/425-4753	4-6, 10-12, 16-18 <b>BEAUMONT</b> <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> 409/842-4664		



**25-26**  
**HARLINGEN**  
The Flower Show  
956/797-2754

**PORT ARTHUR**  
Arts & Crafts Show  
409/985-8619

**SPRING**  
Springfest  
Art & Wine  
Festival  
800/653-8696

**TEXAS CITY**  
Trade Days  
409/949-9273

**26**  
**HARLINGEN**  
South Texas  
Chorale  
956/428-6003

**HOUSTON**  
Camera Show  
713/943-7979

**27**  
**CORPUS CHRISTI**  
*Cats*  
800/417-5331

**27-Apr 5**  
**GALVESTON**  
*Elissa* Sea Trials  
409/763-1877

**30-Apr 1**  
**KINGSVILLE**  
Classical Music  
Competition  
361/592-2374

**31**  
**ORANGE**  
*A Bright Idea*  
409/886-5535 or  
800/828-5535

**31-Apr 1**  
**VICTORIA**  
*Driving*  
*Miss Daisy*  
361/576-6277

**31-Apr 3**  
**BEAUMONT**  
Tracy Byrd  
Homecoming  
Weekend  
409/898-4250

**South Texas  
Plains**

**1**  
**DONNA**  
Jack Schultz  
Orchestra  
956/461-3383

**1-4**  
**LAREDO**  
International  
Fair & Exposition  
956/722-9948 or  
800/361-3360

**1-18**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
(began Feb 18)  
*Greater Tuna*  
210/733-7258

**2**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
*Turandot*  
210/226-2891

**3-4, 24-25, 31**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Symphony  
210/554-1010

**4-5**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Remembering  
the Alamo  
210/732-6055

**5**  
**MISSION**  
Jack Schultz  
Orchestra  
956/585-4833

**6**  
**LAREDO**  
Philharmonic  
956/727-8886

**SAN ANTONIO**  
"Dawn at  
the Alamo"  
210/732-6055

**7**  
**THREE RIVERS**  
Brush Country  
Music Jamboree  
361/449-2636  
or 786-3334

**9-11**  
**FALFURRIAS**  
Springfest  
361/325-3333

**10**  
**EDINBURG**  
Jack Schultz  
Orchestra  
956/383-7931

**SAN ANTONIO**  
Glenn Miller  
Orchestra  
210/226-2891

**10-11**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Tejano  
Music Awards  
Fanfair & Festival  
210/222-8862 or  
800/500-8470

**ZAPATA**  
Zapata  
Co Fair  
956/765-4871 or  
800/292-5253

**10-12**  
**COTULLA**  
La Salle  
Co Fair  
800/256-2326

**11**  
**BEEVILLE**  
4-H Rodeo  
361/362-3290

**SAN ANTONIO**  
St Patrick's Day  
Run  
210/497-8435

**14**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
"Blues in the  
Light"  
210/207-2234

**15-19**  
**MERCEDES**  
Rio Grande Valley  
Livestock Show  
956/565-2456

**16-19**  
**GOLIAD**  
Goliad Co  
Fair & Rodeo  
512/645-3563  
or 645-2492

**17**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Ceremony at  
Alamo Shrine  
210/497-8435

St Patrick's Day  
Celebration  
210/225-0000

**17-19**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Alamo  
Irish Festival  
210/497-8435

Rope America  
210/698-3300

**18**  
**GOLIAD**  
Battle of  
Coletto Creek  
Reenactment  
361/645-3405

**SAN ANTONIO**  
St Patrick's Day  
Parade  
210/497-8435

**19**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Dyeing the  
River Green  
210/497-8435

**20**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
*The Barber*  
*of Seville*  
210/207-2234

**22-26**  
**EAGLE PASS**  
International  
Friendship  
Festival  
830/773-3224 or  
888/355-3224

**23-25**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Senior Pro Rodeo  
210/698-3300

**24-26**  
**LAREDO**  
Home & Garden  
Show  
800/208-3646

**SAN ANTONIO**  
Fiesta of Gems  
210/653-2059

**24-26**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
Renaissance Faire  
210/225-0731

**25-26**  
**GOLIAD**  
Reenactment  
361/645-3563

**26**  
**WESLACO**  
The Katona Twins  
Guitar Duo  
956/686-7619

**27**  
**LAREDO**  
Tommy Dorsey  
Orchestra  
956/727-8886

**31**  
**SAN ANTONIO**  
*Anne of*  
*Green Gables*  
210/340-4060

**Hill Country**

**2**  
**AUSTIN**  
Celebrate Texas  
512/383-0505

**2-4**  
**AUSTIN**  
UIL Girls State  
High School  
Basketball  
Championships  
512/477-6060

**2-5, 9-12**  
**BULVERDE**  
*Pride and*  
*Prejudice*  
830/438-2339

**3-6**  
**AUSTIN**  
*Aida*  
512/472-5992

**4**  
**SAN MARCOS**  
Living History  
Trolley Tour  
512/393-5900

**4-5**  
**BOERNE**  
Antique Show  
830/995-3670

**5**  
**CANYON LAKE**  
Kidfish  
830/964-2223

**STONEWALL**  
St Francis Xavier  
Parish Festival  
830/644-2306

**9-11**  
**AUSTIN**  
UIL  
Boys State  
High School  
Basketball  
Championships  
512/477-6060

**9-12, 19-21**  
**AUSTIN**  
Bach Festival  
512/719-3300

**10-11**  
**AUSTIN**  
Alvin Ailey  
American Dance  
Theatre  
512/471-1444 or  
800/687-6010

**10-19**  
**AUSTIN**  
SXSW  
Music & Media  
Conference  
512/467-7979

**10-26**  
**AUSTIN**  
Livestock Show  
& Rodeo  
512/467-9811

**11**  
**CASTROVILLE**  
Market Trail Day  
830/741-3841

**GEORGETOWN**  
Market Day  
512/868-8675

**11-12**  
**BOERNE**  
Market Days  
830/816-1796

**11-12, 25-26**  
**AUSTIN**  
Wildflower Days  
Festival  
512/292-4200

**12**  
**AUSTIN**  
Zilker Park  
Kite Festival  
512/477-7273

**18**  
**LUCKENBACH**  
Mud Dauber  
Festival & Ball  
830/997-6523

**18-19**  
**AUSTIN**  
African Violet  
Show  
512/477-8672

**GEORGETOWN**  
Quilt Show  
512/869-2955

**19**  
**FREDERICKSBURG**  
Austin Vocal Arts  
Ensemble  
830/997-6523

**21**  
**AUSTIN**  
The Four Seasons  
512/346-0232

**22**  
**AUSTIN**  
"Swingtime"  
512/472-5470

**23**  
**AUSTIN**  
Afro-Cuban  
All-Stars  
512/472-5470

**KERRVILLE**  
Santa Fe  
Chamber Music  
830/896-5727

**24-25**  
**AUSTIN**  
Symphony  
512/476-6064

**BOERNE**  
Shrimp Fest  
830/249-8000

**25**  
**AUSTIN**  
Rosedale Ride  
Bicycle Tour  
512/280-4799

**MARBLE FALLS**  
Market Day  
830/693-0936 or  
800/759-8178

**25-26**  
**FREDERICKSBURG**  
Antiques Show  
830/995-3750

**26**  
**AUSTIN**  
*Three Little Pigs*  
512/472-5470

**26-27**  
**AUSTIN**  
Chamber Music  
512/454-0026

**28-Apr 12**  
**AUSTIN**  
*Sunset Boulevard*  
512/471-1444 or  
800/687-6010

**30-31**  
**AUSTIN**  
Symphony Pops  
512/476-6064

**30-Apr 1**  
**NATALIA**  
Bluebonnet  
Festival  
830/665-3703  
or 665-5439

**Big Bend  
Country**

**2**  
**DEL RIO**  
Texas  
Birthday Party  
830/774-7568

**2-12**  
**ODESSA**  
Shrine Carnival  
915/366-3541

**3-4**  
**MIDLAND**  
*The Emperor &*  
*the Nightingale*  
915/332-1586

**3-5**  
**ALPINE**  
Texas Cowboy  
Poetry Gathering  
915/837-8191 or  
800/561-3735

**3-11**  
**EL PASO**  
Siglo de Oro  
Drama Festival  
915/532-7273

**3-5, 30-Apr 2**  
**LAJITAS**  
Rio Grande  
Gourmet Raft Trip  
210/821-5600

**3-Apr 2**  
**MIDLAND**  
*Greater Tuna*  
915/682-4111

**4**  
**MIDLAND**  
*The Magic Flute*  
915/520-7515

Lindsayan  
String Quartet  
915/563-0921

**4-5**  
**EL PASO**  
Bruce Nehring  
Consort  
915/534-7664

Pro-Musica  
915/833-9400

**5**  
**ODESSA**  
Lindsayan  
String Quartet  
915/563-0921

**10-25**  
**EL PASO**  
*Agnes of God*  
915/532-3799

**11**  
**MIDLAND**  
Pancake Jamboree  
915/683-3611

**12**  
**EL PASO**  
Transmountain  
Challenge  
12-K Run/Walk  
915/833-1231

**13-15**  
**EL PASO**  
*El Paso Times*  
Spelling Bee  
915/546-6255

**14-15**  
**EL PASO**  
Trade Show  
915/771-7061

**16, 18**  
**EL PASO**  
*Cavalleria*  
*Rusticana/*  
*Pagliacci*  
915/581-5534

**17-19**  
**EL PASO**  
Home & Garden  
Show  
409/943-5906

**17-19, 24-25**  
**ODESSA**  
*The Star-Spanpled*  
*Girl*  
915/550-5456

**18-19**  
**MIDLAND**  
Radio Club  
Hamfest  
915/689-5441

**ODESSA**  
Gem & Mineral  
Show  
915/362-3282

**18-19**  
**ODESSA**  
Street Rod  
Car Show  
915/366-3541

**19**  
**DEL RIO**  
Taste of the Border  
830/775-7471

**EL PASO**  
Early Music Consort  
915/755-0724

**20-24**  
**ODESSA**  
*Riddle of*  
*the Drum*  
915/332-1586

**23-25**  
**ODESSA**  
College Rodeo  
915/335-6854

**24-25**  
**EL PASO**  
Classical Cello  
915/532-3776

**25**  
**MIDLAND**  
Eugene Fodor  
915/563-0921

**30-Apr 2**  
**ODESSA**  
Fiesta de Arte  
915/550-2483

**31**  
**ODESSA**  
Shenandoah  
Shakespeare  
Express  
915/332-1586

**31-Apr 2**  
**MIDLAND**  
Pickwick Players  
915/682-4111

**travel**  
**Texas Highways**

<http://www.texashighways.com>

**on the Web**



## Folks, Let's Polka

Most months out of the year in Texas, you'll find a full plate of festivals celebrating everything from fire ants to sweet potatoes. But in February, the calendar looks less busy. Pondering this phenomenon five years ago, a group of devoted musicians and music-lovers came up with an annual Polka Fest. Held February 19 and 20 this year at the Knights of Columbus Hall in New Braunfels, this festival will heat up the chilliest of Central Texas evenings.

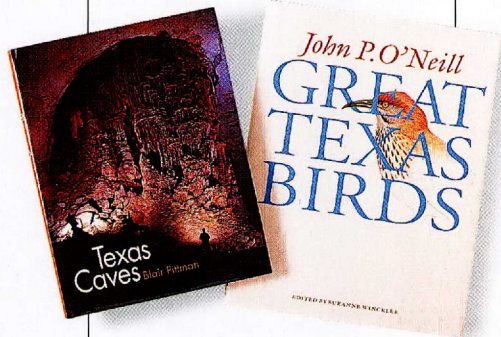
From noon until 10:30 on Saturday night and 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday, dozens of local polka bands take the stage, producing polka's melodious mayhem for an energetic and appreciative crowd. With the joyful cacophony of accordions, tubas, trumpets, and saxophones energizing the upbeat, here's your chance to practice (or learn) the schottische, waltz, polka, and other dances.

Advance tickets (recommended) cost \$7.50 for Saturday, \$6.50 for Sunday; at-the-door tickets are also available for a slightly higher price. Food and drinks are available. To order tickets, or to learn more details about the event, write to the Polka Band Leaders of New Braunfels, Box 312514, New Braunfels 78131, or call 830/625-9288.

## Caverns and Currents

For lovers of Texas' subterranean world, the mysterious caverns beneath the state's varied topography provide wonderlands of discovery. And in the skies above, birders find a variety of winged creatures unlike anywhere else on earth. While the worlds they explore may seem as different as day and night, birders and cavers share at least one fortunate characteristic—they'll never be bored with Texas'

bounty. Two new books, *Texas Caves*, by avid caver and photographer Blair Pittman, and *Great Texas Birds*, by ornithologist and artist John P. O'Neill, will keep you entertained, too.



As you'll learn in Blair Pittman's book, Texas boasts some 3,000 known, explored caves, most restricted to geologists, biologists, and trained cavers. Within these subterranean worlds grow millions of mineral formations—delicate cave "popcorn," "bacon," "soda straws," and other surreal, fragile wonders. Here, too, are the creatures—blind salamanders, cave crickets and scorpions, Mexican freetail bats—that have adapted to life without light. *Texas Caves* introduces readers to this seldom-seen world via 99 color and black-and-white photographs. It discusses cave exploration and history, and provides information on Texas' seven accessible-to-the-public show caves.

Similarly, with more than 600 species recorded, Texas has more species of birds that live within its borders than any other state. By way of John P. O'Neill's loving watercolors, *Great Texas Birds* brings you 48 of them, from the elegant and comical brown pelican to the inquisitive Eastern bluebird. While the pictures already speak a thousand words, *Great Texas Birds* also devotes an essay to each painting. You'll find eloquent musings by such wordsmiths as the late Edward A. Kutac (who waxes about wild turkeys) to Roland "Ro" Wauer (who reminisces

about a certain proud blue-throated hummingbird).

Look for *Texas Caves* (Texas A&M University Press) and *Great Texas Birds* (University of Texas Press) in your library or bookstore (both books cost \$34.95 hardcover). To order *Texas Caves* from the publisher, call 800/826-8911; for *Great Texas Birds*, call 800/252-3206.

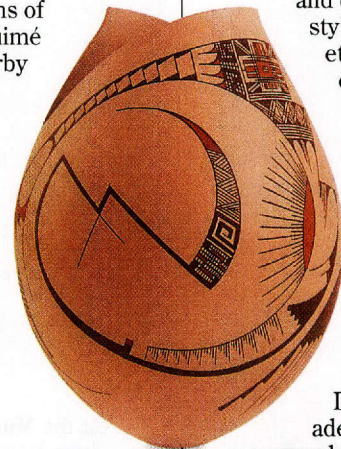
## Pots of Gold

About 150 miles south of the Texas border, in Chihuahua, Mexico, the small village of Mata Ortiz has revived the area's centuries-old ceramic tradition. Some 60 examples of the villagers' work—formed from hand-dug clay and fashioned without the use of potters' wheels or kilns—appear in the exhibition *Masters of Mata Ortiz: Pottery from Northern Mexico*, at the Austin Museum of Art-Laguna Gloria through March 12.

The methods used by Mata Ortiz's potters may be centuries old, but it was not until 1976 that the village's craftspeople began to learn their art. And amazingly enough, one man—a former woodcutter-turned-potter named Juan Quezada—is responsible for the renaissance. Inspired by shards of pottery found during the late-1950s excavations of prehistoric Paquimé ruins in the nearby village of Casas Grandes, Juan began teaching himself the art of ceramics. He then taught his family, who in turn taught the village. Today, Mata Ortiz's potters

**The Austin Museum of Art-Laguna Gloria showcases the works of the potters of Mata Ortiz, Mexico, through March 12.**

PHOTO BY JORGE VÉRTIZ



are known throughout the United States as masters and preservers of an ancient art form.

In addition to stunning examples of Mata Ortiz's pottery, the exhibit in Austin also features photographs of the Paquimé archeological sites, the potters at work, and their environs.

The Austin Museum of Art-Laguna Gloria, at 3809 W. 35th St., opens Tue-Sat 10-5 (Thu until 8), Sun noon-5. Admission: \$2, \$1 students with ID and age 55 and older, free age 12 and younger. Thu. is dollar day. Three of the four galleries are wheelchair accessible. Write to Box 5568, Austin 78763, or call 512/458-8191.

## Más Mardi Gras

No doubt about it, the spirit of Mardi Gras has Galveston in its throes throughout the month of February and into March (see story, page 4). But if an island trek is out of the question, or if you want to multiply your Mardi Gras fun, these five other Fat Tuesday events statewide may float your boat.

On February 5 at San Antonio's La Villita Assembly Hall, celebrate the Mardi Gras season with some 700 other revelers at the Mardi Gras Fiesta Ball. The event features live Brazilian music, a costume contest, food and drink, and even Mardi Gras-style vendors. Tickets cost \$15; to order them, or to learn more, call 210/737-0996.

At Denton's Center for the Visual Arts on February 5, the Denton Main Street Program hosts its annual Mardi Gras Dinner & Dance, a masquerade ball that this year boasts an Italian theme. Celebrants can dance to the music of a live swing band, vie for prizes in a costume contest, and enjoy





From mid-February through mid-March, a sea of daffodils blooms at Mrs. Lee's Garden, near Gladewater.

Italian food and drink. Tickets cost \$35. For more details, call 940/349-8529.

Austin's annual Carnaval Brasileiro, the city's annual Brazilian-style Mardi Gras celebration, welcomes Rio de Janeiro's oldest Carnaval parade group, A Bateria da Portela, along with Susanna Sharpe and the Samba Police, to the City Coliseum on February 11 and 12. Carnaval Brasileiro, begun in the 1970s, has grown into one of Austin's wildest parties. Tickets cost \$25 at many Austin retailers, \$29 by phoning 888/597-7827. Call 512/452-6832 for details. Web site: [www.carnaval-austin.com](http://www.carnaval-austin.com).

Coming up in March, the towns of Jefferson and Port Arthur host extravagant celebrations of Mardi Gras, featuring parades with floats and trinket-tossing riders, carnivals, live music, fireworks, and costumes galore. Jefferson's events unfold March 3-5, and Port Arthur parties March 2-5. For details on Jefferson's Mardi Gras, call 888/GO-RELAX or 903/665-2672. Web site: [www.jefferson-texas.com](http://www.jefferson-texas.com).



At the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, thousands of newly discovered artifacts shed light on the nature of Chinese culture.

THE INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY, CHINESE ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, BEIJING

For details on Port Arthur's bash, call 409/985-7822 or 800/235-7822. Web site: [www.port-arthur.com](http://www.port-arthur.com).

### By the Way...

Some of spring's first flowers burst forth late this month in the northeast Texas town of Gladewater, where an astounding profusion of daffodils at Mrs. Lee's Garden creates a 20-acre-wide sea of gold. The late Helen Lee, the wife of a wealthy oil baron, brought a railroad car of daffodil bulbs to Gladewater in 1960 and planted them around a small lake on her property. The daffodils have since multiplied and flourished, much to the delight of the garden's lucky visitors....

call 903/845-5501 or 800/627-0315. Web site: [hometown.aol.com/helenlee-fndtn/history.htm](http://hometown.aol.com/helenlee-fndtn/history.htm).

Aren't there days when you'd like to be in someone else's shoes? If so, march on over to the Houston Children's Museum and

try the new exhibit *Global Shoes* (through Mar. 5) on for size. Yes, the exhibit is aimed at kids, but where else will you find footwear on display from more than 40 countries and dozens of occupations? Rice-straw sandals from Korea, embroidered mules from Morocco, and sheepskin boots from Afghanistan speak volumes about culture and climate. In a section dubbed "Shoes for Work and Play," footwear designed for firemen, clowns, construction workers, cowboys, and ballerinas may inspire you to do a little sole-searching....call 713/522-1138.

What better place than Kingsville, home of the famous King Ranch, to host the **8th Annual South Texas Ranching Heritage Festival?**

From February 18-20, festival-goers celebrate the hardworking vaqueros of South Texas ranches with authentic chuck-wagon cooking, ranch-rideo competitions, storytelling, crafts demonstrations, lectures and presentations, a cowboy church service, and even a mariachi concert....call 361/593-2810.

From February 19-May 29, the LBJ Library and Museum in Austin will showcase the works of 37 established and up-and-coming black artists in the exhibit "**Our New Day Begins**": African American Artists Entering the Millennium. Part of a celebration of LBJ's Great Society legislation, which included the Civil Rights Act of 1964, this show highlights works by artists like John Biggers, Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, and others....call 512/916-5137. Web site: [www.lbjlib.utexas.edu](http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu).

While you're in Galveston for Mardi Gras, duck into the **Galveston County**

**For information on emergency road conditions in Texas, call 800/452-9292.**

**Historical Museum** for a dose of island history. During the Fat Tuesday fête, the museum will highlight nearly a dozen elaborate Mardi Gras costumes from the 1920s and '30s. You'll find permanent exhibits on the pirates and buccaneers who occupied Galveston County in the early 1800s, the history of lighthouses, Galveston in the Civil War years, the tragic 1900 hurricane, and the recent implosion of the historic Buccaneer Hotel....call 409/766-6340.



© STEPHAN MARC SOLTZ, SEPARATING SERIES

The LBJ Library in Austin features the works of 37 African-American artists in an exhibit that celebrates LBJ's Great Society legislation.

At the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from February 13-May 7, lucky visitors can see one of the most important surveys of Chinese art and artifacts ever lent by China. **The Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology: Celebrated Discoveries from The People's Republic of China** includes several hundred items, including decorative objects made from bamboo and gold, life-size earthenware warriors, silk textiles, and musical instruments. The items date from 5000 BC to AD 923.... call 713/639-7300. Web site: [www.mfah.org](http://www.mfah.org).



**TEXCETERA** brings you readers' tips and timely travel tidbits. Because we're unable to check out every item in "Readers Recommend," and because details can change, we encourage you to call ahead for more information. When we mention new places, products, or publications, we try to include only those with promise; keep in mind, however, that problems can occur with start-up businesses.

If you run across a noteworthy Lone Star attraction, restaurant, event, or product, we'd love to hear about it. Write to Readers Recommend, *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. Email: editors@texas-highways.com. Remember that space constraints prevent us from running every suggestion we receive. We reserve the right to edit items.

## READERS RECOMMEND...

**O**ur family had a great time at the **Dallas World Aquarium** in downtown **Dallas**.

**Marietta Frew, via email**

*The Dallas World Aquarium & Zoological Garden is at 1801 N. Griffin St.; 214/720-2224; Web site: www.dwazoo.com.*

**I**n **Turkey**, you can stay at one of the oldest continuously operated hotels in Texas (**Hotel Turkey**, 1927) and enjoy gourmet meals at the **Peanut Patch Cafe**. Turkey was the home of Bob Wills, so don't expect to find a room at the Hotel Turkey the last Saturday in April, when 12,000 to 15,000 people show up to celebrate Bob Wills Day. Nearby **Caprock Canyons State Park** and a Rails-to-Trails project that runs through Turkey offer ample trails, so take your mountain bike for a real off-road bicycling adventure.

**Jim Strickland, Austin**

*Hotel Turkey is at 3rd and Alexander; 806/423-1151 or 800/657-7110. Web site: www.llano.net/turkey/hotel. Peanut Patch Cafe is at 2nd and Main; 806/423-1051. For information on Caprock Canyons State Park, write to Box 204, Quitaque 79255; 806/455-1492.*

**W**e have sampled barbecue at many places, but the best, tenderest, most flavorful barbecue we have found is at **Dean's Bar-B-Q and Catering** in **Beaumont**, where owner Charlie

St. Anthony (300 E. Travis St.), call 210/227-4392.

## RIVER CRUISE MOVES

**T**he Hill Country's popular year-round **Vanishing Texas River Cruise** now casts off from a new locale—**Canyon of the Eagles Lodge and Nature Park** on the north shore of **Lake Buchanan**, just down the road from the cruise's previous headquarters.



MICHAEL A. MURPHY

*Listed in the state and national historic registries, Hotel Turkey (in Turkey) has been in continuous operation since it was built in 1927.*

Dean offers meals for dining in or taking out.

**Gandy and Helen Hall, Beaumont**  
*Dean's Bar-B-Q and Catering is at 805 Magnolia; 409/835-7956.*

## VENERABLE VENUE

**S**an Antonio's **St. Anthony Hotel**, a downtown landmark since 1909, has reopened its celebrated **Starlight Terrace** for the first time in almost 30 years. The charming rooftop garden terrace, some 10 floors up atop the hotel's west section, accommodated many a San Antonio social engagement from the 1930s to the early '70s. Today's restored Starlight Terrace, complete with bandstand, provides its classic outdoor setting for wedding receptions, social gatherings, and business affairs. To reserve the Starlight Terrace, or for information about the

From November through March, the cruise aboard the 70-foot, fully enclosed **Texas Eagle II** affords guests an opportunity to view the North American bald eagles that winter at Lake Buchanan. In springtime and summer, passengers can see wildflowers, wildlife, and scenic vistas along rugged Colorado River Canyon.

Canyon of the Eagles Lodge and Nature Park offers a multitude of attractions, including a 64-room lodge, full-service tent and RV sites, primitive camping, a dining room, a butterfly garden, hiking trails, sandy beaches, fishing piers, rental boats, and a gift shop. The park sits at the end of Ranch Road 2341, reached via Texas 29 west of Burnet.

For information and reservations for Vanishing Texas River Cruises, call 800/4RIVER4; to learn more about Canyon of

the Eagles Lodge and Nature Park, call 800/977-0081.

## COOKIN' UP ROMANCE

**T**he **Cook's Cottage**, a bed and breakfast in **Fredericksburg**, numbers among the top 10 most romantic inns in America, as selected by *Country Home* magazine in the September 1999 issue. Cited for its antique furnishings, whirlpool bath, luxurious bedding, and secluded location, the one-room guesthouse has also garnered mention in *Travel and Leisure* magazine, as well as in *Texas Highways'* February 1999 issue. Hostess Patsy Swendson adds such amenities as chocolate-raspberry-chambord fondue with fresh strawberries, homemade bath salts, and custom-designed body lotions. To learn more about The Cook's Cottage and a sampling of other bed and breakfasts in Fredericksburg, call 210/493-5101, or go to [www.bed-inn-breakfast-tx.com](http://www.bed-inn-breakfast-tx.com).

## BIG BEND ROCKS—AND GEMS

**L**earn about the rocks and gems of the Big Bend area at the new **Last Frontier Museum**, which opened in the fall of 1999. The museum, situated in the lobby of the **Antelope Lodge**, 2310 W. US 90 in **Alpine**, features examples of the quartz, agate, Jasper, opal, petrified wood, and fossils found in the region. Call 915/837-3881. Visitors looking for accommodations can find family-oriented comfort at Antelope Lodge. Call 800/880-8106. Web site: [www.travelbigbend.com/html/antelopelodge.html](http://www.travelbigbend.com/html/antelopelodge.html).

## Down the Road

**B**ehold the mesmerizing magic of Enchanted Rock and the botanical beauties of Mercer Arboretum, Moody Gardens, and Wild Azalea Canyons—all in the March issue.



# W I N D O W   O N   T E X A S

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© RICHARD REYNOLDS



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**W**ith the cloud-shrouded Chisos Mountains as a backdrop, a century plant, or agave, displays its bright yellow blooms. Depending on rainfall, the agave requires years to flower. Afterwards, the plant dies, usually leaving some “pups,” or small rosettes, to continue its life cycle.

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