The Wildflowers are Coming!

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The TRAVEL MAGA ★★★★ APRIL 2016

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Great Expectations

Spring is always full of surprises, from its unpredictable arrival to just which natural wonders the season will bring. But there's one sure bet every April: *Texas Highways*' salute to blooms, this year featuring Melissa Gaskill's "Magnificent Seven" coverage of signature flowers across the state, aah-inspiring photography, and road-trip tips for petal peepers—all beginning on page 62.

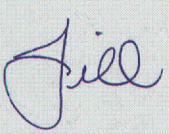
At press time in late February, our friends at The University of Texas at Austin Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center were predicting a promising flower display this year. "Last year's dry summer opened up space for some of the fall-germinating natives that bloom in the spring," says Andrea DeLong-Amaya, the Center's director of horticulture. "And we saw a lot of germination in the fall thanks to the rains. We're looking for a good season—with rains it could be spectacular."

And with nature's new blossoms comes a wave of animal babies, which only adds to the "aw" factor at Texas' drive-through wildlife ranches. (See Paula Disbrowe and Will van Overbeek's story beginning on page 78.) "Spring is the peak of when offspring are born," says Tiffany Soechting, animal specialist and marketing director at Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch, between New Braunfels and San Antonio. "That is when nature's nutrients are at their peak and that boost of nutrients is beneficial for mother's milk."

Among the many spring arrivals, Natural Bridge is expecting additions to the herds of Arabian oryx (Tiffany says there are only 1,000 of this species surviving in the wild) and scimitar-horned oryx (pictured), which are extinct in the wild. There are expectant zebras, as well, and young Deak, a reticulated giraffe born in November, will no doubt stand out on the newly lush landscape.

Likewise, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Glen Rose will welcome new residents, including scimitar-horned oryx, addax, gemsbok, dama gazelle, blackbuck, and wildebeest. "And I'm talking about 10 to 15 calves for each species," says Warren Lewis, Fossil Rim's director of marketing.

Of course, the fuzzy additions are important to the preserves' conservation and species-replenishment efforts. They're also an adorable perk for visitors lucky enough to share in their first Texas spring.



Jill Lawless, Editor

WHERE WE'LL BE NEXT MONTH:

Summer school never sounded so fun, with our roundup of horizon-broadening excursions. Try the trapeze, or learn to fly-board, fly-fish, sail, and sew. Also in May's lineup: home ballparks for the Round Rock Express, Corpus Christi Hooks, and other minor-league teams; Dallas and Houston by CityPASS; the Odessa meteor crater, and San Antonio's Tejano Conjunto Festival.

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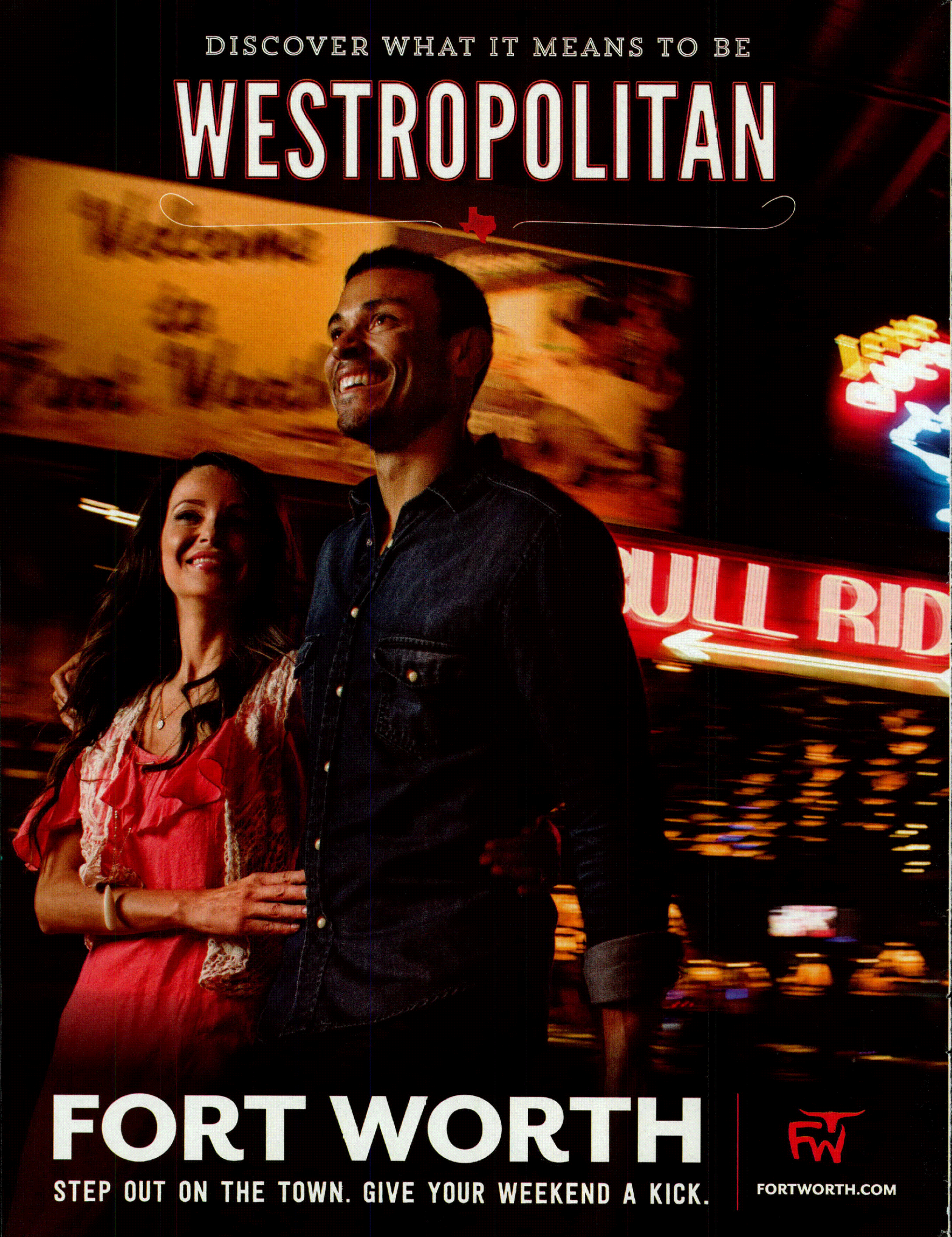
PHOTO: Scimitar-horned oryx: Courtesy Tiffany Soechting, Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch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VOLUME 63 / NUMBER 4

APRIL 2016

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

FEATURES

52 ***We Love Our Mudbugs***
Leave it to the creative cooks of the Texas Gulf Coast to elevate crawfish into a spicy reflection of our state's diverse melting pot. Button up your bib and dig in!

Text by **ROBB WALSH**
Photographs by **ERIC W. POHL**

62 ***The Magnificent Seven***
Despite the vagaries of Texas weather, wildflowers prove to be a consistent and colorful harbinger of spring. Take in these beauties from across the state, and check out our photo exhibit at the Wildflower Center in Austin.

Text by **MELISSA GASKILL**

78 ***Something Wild***
Fossil Rim Wildlife Center and Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch offer the chance to observe rare animals in expansive natural settings—all from the comfort of your car.

Text by **PAULA DISBROWE**
Photographs by **WILL VAN OVERBEEK**

@ FIND MORE ONLINE
Be sure to visit us at texashighways.com for more content and events.

PHOTO: Narrowleaf coneflower, © Sean Fitzgerald

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APRIL 2016

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ON OUR COVER

There's no more iconic symbol of Texas spring than the bluebonnet. The Legislature has designated all six bluebonnet species as the state flower. Photo © Sean Fitzgerald; Illustration by Margaret Kimball

PHOTO: Michael Amador

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Contributing Editors
Erin Inks, Julie Stratton

Photography Editor Brandon Jakobeit
Contributing Photographers
Michael Amador, Kevin Stillman, Will van Overbeek

Art Director Jane Wu
Associate Art Director Kirsti Harms

Web Editor Lois M. Rodriguez
Digital Art Director Matt Wetzler

Operations Manager Deborah Follien
Circulation Manager Andrea Lin
Marketing/Ancillary Manager Katy Venable
Production Coordinator Raquel V. Sanchez
Accounts Payable LaKena Cooks
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APRIL 2016

GO GLAMPING!

CAMP IN COMFORT!

If the thought of sacrificing creature comforts is keeping you from camping, consider "glamping."

BIRDERS' BASICS

A few tips to help get you started in the fascinating world of birdwatching.

SMALL TOWN, RICH MENU

Taste the wealth of creative cuisine at Welfare Café, where German and Texas flavors grace the tables of this once-abandoned outpost.

PLUS

SPRING FORWARD

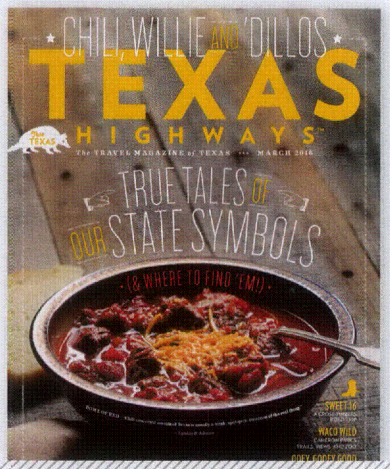
These spring events make it extra festive to be in Texas!

MERGE

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

Local friends ask me why I make an annual March pilgrimage back to Texas. The last sentence of the "Sweet 16" story provides me with a definitive response: "Because as any road-tripping Texan knows, once is never enough."

MILT SYLWESTER, *Kona, Hawaii*



OUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH...

Texas 16—Goldthwaite Eagles, San Saba Armadillos, Priddy Pirates, Comanche Indians, Strawn Greyhounds, Graham Steers... It's always time for high school sports in Texas! (Not far off 16, at the crossroads of 36 and 281, my Hamilton Bulldogs!)
Dewayne Clover Hamilton

Chili Tease

The cover of the March issue displayed a luscious bowl of red, complete with cheese. The article on state symbols illustrated the same bowl of chili, sans cheese. In any event, the chili looks great, but after the big buildup, you neglected to include a recipe. Great temptation and no opportunity for fulfillment. Any chance this might be remedied?

JR ROLLO
Kerrville

Good news, JR. Writer Eric Pohl, who penned the story, also cooked and photographed that tempting bowl of red. Eric has agreed to share his "secret" recipe. Find it at texashighways.com/eat.

In the Weeds

I always enjoy reading your magazine and the March 2016 edition was no different. However, I was disappointed that you omitted a state symbol that is basic to the natural heritage of Texas: the state grass (sideoats grama, *Bouteloua curtipendula*). The grass may be found in the prairie regions of Texas.

SUSAN BAGGETT
Huntsville

Endless Highway

I certainly enjoyed the article about Texas' longest state highway ["Sweet 16," March]—541.8 miles. Whew! But it'd be interesting to know which state highways are second and third. I know Texas 6 must be one of the longer ones. It runs from just onshore near Galveston northwest all the way to the Red River north of Quanah. In fact it still is named Highway 6 on into Oklahoma. Which one is next?

JERRY EBANKS
College Station

Texas 6 is indeed the second-longest state highway, measuring

READERS RECOMMEND

Froberg's Farm

Froberg's Farm in Alvin is a wholesome family outing. The Froberg family opened the original market in 1936 and it has prospered for several generations. Other than selling most types of produce, Froberg's bakes thousands of pies a year, makes fresh popcorn, and has a large corn maze and hayrides in the fall. The Frobergs grow various citrus and figs, but their widespread reputation is from their strawberries, including pick-your-own from January through May. Owners Alfred and Nina Froberg not only sell top-quality produce and goodies, they are a hard-working couple who are out there every day to make your experience a joy and to show kids that not everything comes in a can.

LELAND STRACENER, *Alvin*

Froberg's Farm is at 3601 Texas 6 West in Alvin. Call 281/585-3531; facebook.com/FrobergFarm.

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476 miles. Third longest is Texas 36, which runs 342 miles (excluding concurrencies with other routes) from Abilene to Freeport. A tip-o'-the-hat to David Freidenfeld of TxDOT's Transportation Planning & Programming Division for the info.

A Big Life

My husband, Frank, and I first visited Big Bend National Park on November 8, 1954. We spent the second night of our honeymoon in a little cabin near headquarters. We also brought our two sons here in about 1968 and again visited in 1995. Anytime of the year, there is something beautiful to see. In the spring, the desert is abloom. Frank and I have celebrated our 61st anniversary and are still traveling.

JOY BRUSSEL
Kendalia

Roll the Tape

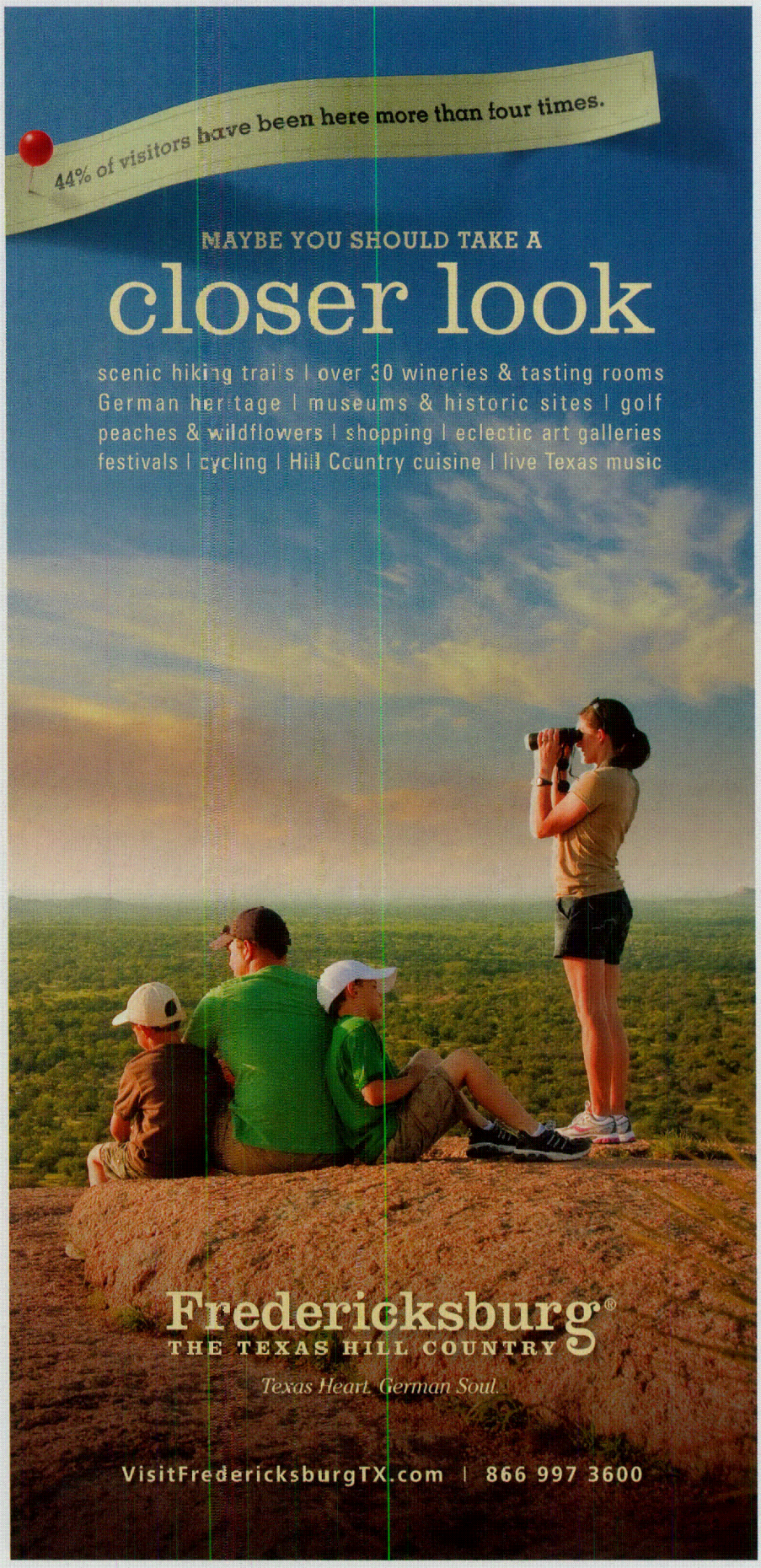
I remember the Manske Roll [March] so well from my college days. Back then (the '70s), it was Southwest Texas State University, and Gil's was a staple for me. Once out of class, off to The Corner Pocket for some 9 ball and brew. Then, off to Gil's for the burger and roll. On the weekends, it was a shot down the road to Luling to City Market for BBQ. Yep, I ate pretty good back then!

JEFF GEYER
Hockley

Texas Pride

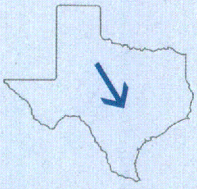
Thank you for keeping your magazine about Texas and its beauty. You can love and talk about Texas without political pandering. I love learning about our great state, one roadside stop at a time. I love that your magazine celebrates the Texas spirit and understands that we are a widely diverse group of people all united by the love of this state.

LISA AHRLETT
Facebook



Scenic
ROUTE

30° 32' 35.17" N
98° 42' 15.55" W



Hill Country

The Hill Country is known for its wildflower displays, and the roads between Llano and Fredericksburg generally offer picturesque fields and pockets of Indian blanket (pictured), bluebonnets, Indian paintbrush, and other popular species. Travel the 38 miles between the two towns along Texas 16 or take detours along Ranch-to-Market roads 2323 or 965 and make it a loop. Be mindful of private property and be careful when stopping.

If you can't make it to the Hill Country this spring, visit www.**texashighways.com** and search "wildflower drives" for additional suggested routes.

PHOTO: © Joe Lowery

Taste the Texas-style goodness.

It's no secret that Bryan College Station is more jeans and boots than boutonnieres, but we've still got our fair share of five-star food and entertainment. Locals love the eats from Chef Tai's Mobile Bistro, a homegrown food truck serving gourmet creations on the go. Want dinner and a show? Our downtown clubs and galleries offer plenty of art, culture, and excitement, with a little Texas charm thrown in the mix. It's just one way we keep our city fine, but friendly. Stop by and feel it for yourself, and see what makes Bryan College Station **powered by good.**

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Of *Feathers* and *Hope*

THE GALVESTON ISLAND FEATHERFEST AND NATURE PHOTOFEST

text by GARY CLARK

ZOOM ZOOM
FeatherFest offers a wide range of birding and photography field trips, including outings to Bolivar Peninsula.

PHOTO: © Kathy Adams Clark

"HOPE' IS THE THING WITH feathers," wrote 19th-Century American poet Emily Dickinson in the opening line of her poem of the same name.

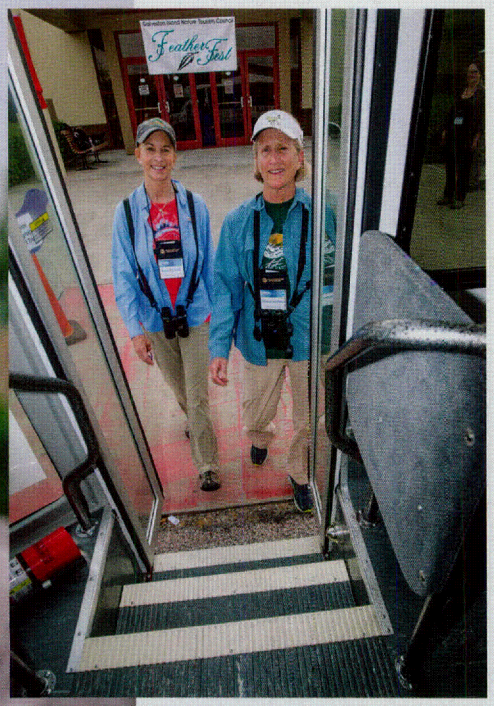
This phrase came to mind as I boarded a tour bus before dawn last April during Galveston FeatherFest and Nature PhotoFest. With binoculars hanging from our necks and hats on our heads, my fellow birders and I were excited about the potential for great bird viewing, spectacular photo opportunities, and illuminating insights from expert guides. Despite a brisk southeast wind and cloudy skies threatening rain, we were hopeful.

And our hopes were not dashed. Measuring 27 miles long and three miles wide, Galveston Island is a birders' paradise—especially during FeatherFest, which takes place April 14-17 this year. Billions of birds pass through the Upper Texas Coast in April after an arduous flight across the Gulf of Mexico from staging grounds on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. Untold numbers of those birds make their first landfall in the woodlots, marshes, and freshwater ponds of Galveston Island.

FeatherFest capitalizes on this phenomenon with four days of activities, including dozens of guided bus and boat field trips to various birding sites; photography and birding workshops; themed dinners; a market featuring photography equipment and arts and crafts; a FledglingFest for children; and a raptor show.

GALVESTON FEATHERFEST AND NATURE PHOTOFEST is April 14-17. Online registration is open until April 10, or you can register during the festival at the Island Community Center, 4700 Broadway. Call 832/459-5533; www.galvestonfeatherfest.com.

PHOTOS: © Kathy Adams Clark



BIRD LAND

At left, Kevin Gaines of Sky Kings Falconry presents a laughing kookaburra, a type of kingfisher, at a FeatherFest photography workshop. Above, two birdwatchers board a field-trip bus at the Island Community Center.

Put on by the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council, FeatherFest is headquartered at the Island Community Center on Broadway, the location of most events and the meeting point for most tours.

Last year's event drew about 650 birders and photographers, and participants recorded sightings of 222 bird species—everything from blue-winged teals to magnificent frigatebirds, red-shouldered hawks, purple gallinules, and buff-breasted sandpipers. The birding field trips occur the area, including the Anahuac and Brazos national wildlife refuges, the Beaumont area, Bolivar Peninsula, Brazos Bend

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and Galveston Island state parks, Galveston Bay, the East End Lagoon Nature Preserve, High Island, the Historic Lagow Ranch, the Katy Prairie, Moody Gardens, the Texas City Prairie Preserve, North Deer Island, Offatts Bayou, Pelican Island, West Isle Marsh, and elsewhere. Most of the field trips cost about $45 to $70, while the kids' tours cost $15 and an overnight pre-festival photography trip to Rockport with nature photographer Larry Ditto is priced at $700.

During my outing to Bolivar Peninsula, we navigated a bewildering diversity of shorebirds feeding in a muddy, marshy pond on the peninsula, which sits between the shores of Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Many of these shorebirds had migrated from their Central and South American winter homes on a path of roughly 600 nautical miles across the Gulf of Mexico.

"This one's a short-billed dowitcher," pointed out Michael J. Austin, a guide from Pearland. "The best mark early in the spring like this is that the orange [underside] on a short-billed dowitcher is very pale and it ends up in a whitish belly."

"That's a least sandpiper, a little mouse-like bird," added guide Kevin Karlson. "The under wings have a dark trailing edge."

In the PhotoFest portion of the event, Texas professional photographers, such as Ditto, Scott Buckel, Kathy Adams Clark, Sean Fitzgerald, and Tim Timmis, instruct photographers of all skill levels on the technicalities of shutter speed, aperture, and framing—all with an eye to capturing images of birds and island scenery. For example, Kathy Adams Clark (my wife and my partner in bird guiding adventures) will again this year lead a Saturday morning field trip with Sky King Falconry—a rescue group from the Central Texas town of Paige—to practice taking pictures of raptors in natural settings. Last year, I also accompanied Kathy for the Night and Long Exposure Beach Photography Field Trip. Held at sunset and after dark at the Galveston Pleasure Pier, Kathy teaches participants the art of photographing magical scenes of glitzy lights against a backdrop of coastal evening sky and seascape.

Back at the Island Community Center, I marveled at the enticing bazaar of birding and photography equipment and memorabilia—all manner of binoculars, spotting scopes, cameras, books, and bird-themed artworks. I also made mental note of workshops to attend in coming years, such as Houston naturalists Bob and Maggie Honig's excursion to identify butterflies and dragonflies at Galveston Island State Park, and Galveston naturalist

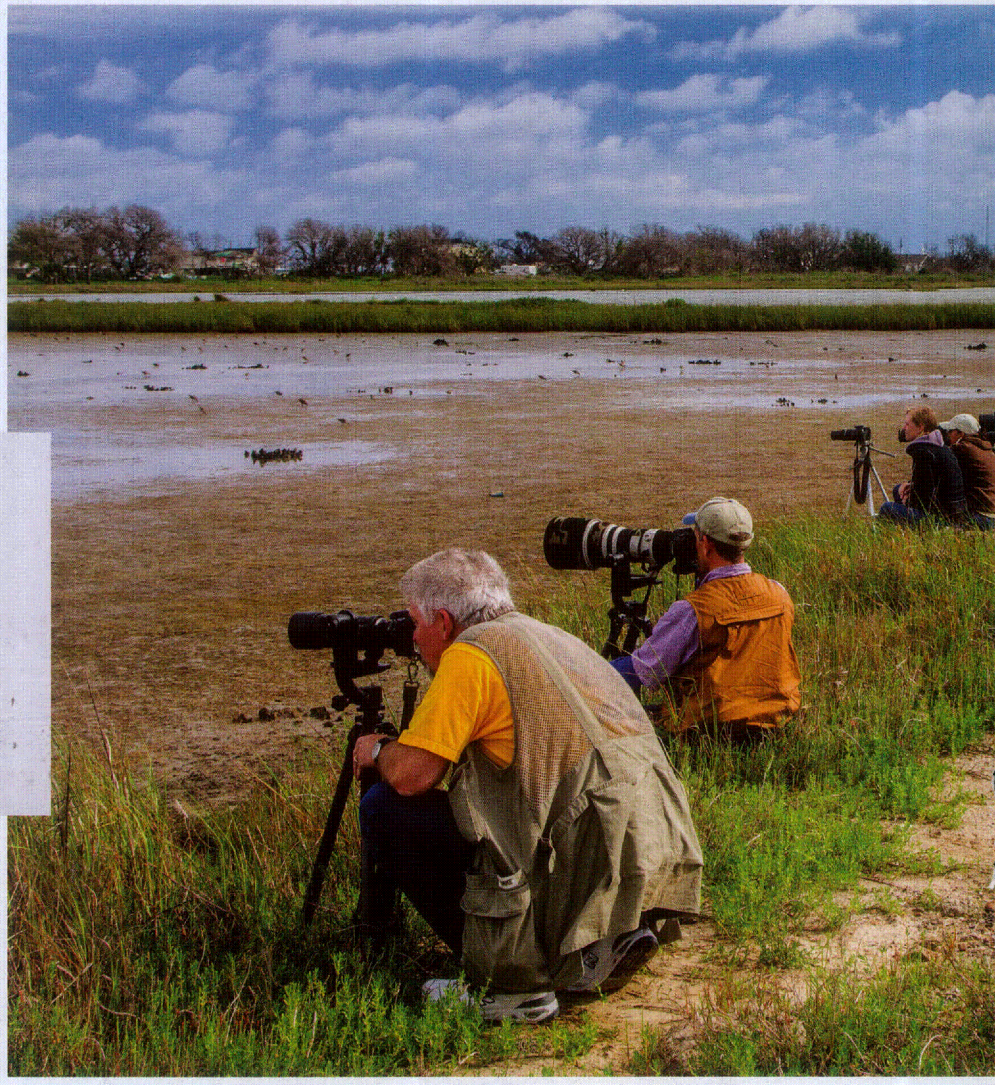


PHOTO OP WITH BIRDS

Above, a dowitcher feeds at a Bolivar Peninsula mudflat. At right, photographers train their lenses on a shallow pond on Bolivar Peninsula during FeatherFest.

PHOTOS: © Kathy Adams Clark

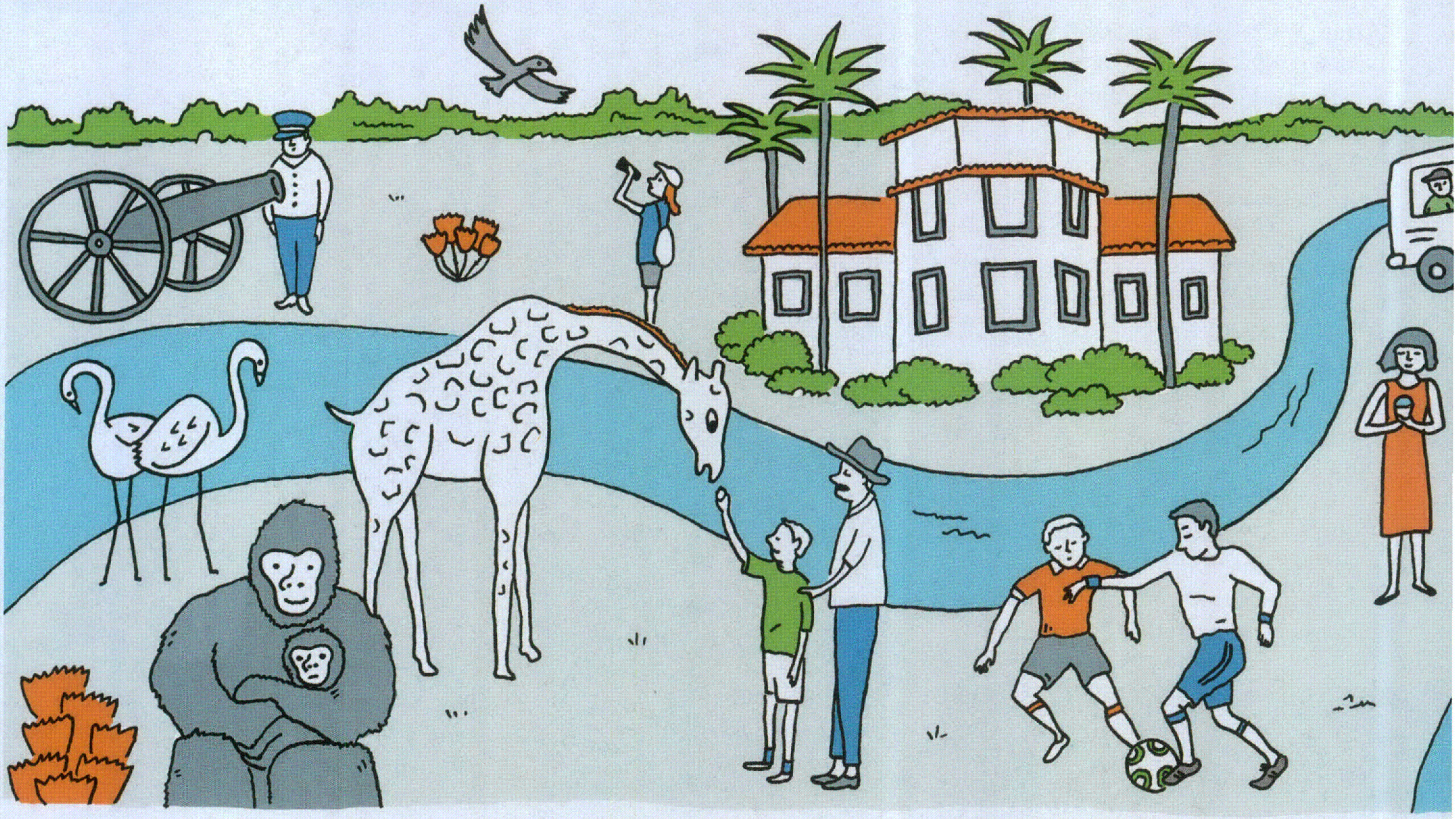
Don Wilkerson's kayak trips in the state park.

Dropping in later on some of the classrooms at the center, I was entertained by a Saturday morning children's program on bird identification led by Stennie Meadours, past president of the Houston Audubon Society.

"Galveston is one of the best places to bird," Meadours told the youngsters. "The younger you are when you get interested in birds, the longer you have to enjoy them. So, what do you like about birds?"

One little girl raised her hand: "Well, they're colorful, they're loud, and they fly," she said.

The hundreds of birders attending FeatherFest would certainly agree. ★



Countdown *to Spring*

BEST BETS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

text by **Daniel Blue Tyx** *illustration by* **Drue Wagner**

DOWN IN THE RIO GRANDE Valley, there's something about springtime, when the palm trees sway in the southerly breeze and even the cacti are blooming, that calls us out into the great outdoors. Pull out your sunglasses, hats, and hiking boots: Here are some recommended activities, roughly ordered from one end of the Valley to the other.

10 Up Close with Dolphins

You may not see them from the shore, but the placid waters of the Laguna Madre are home to a vibrant community of bottlenose dolphins. To see them in all their leaping, chattering glory, book an open-air boat tour with one of several eco-friendly outfitters that depart daily from the docks of Port Isabel and South Padre Island. Sightings are guaranteed!

Call 800/527-6102 (Port Isabel) or 956/761-6433 (South Padre).

There's something about springtime, when the palm trees sway in the southerly breeze and even the cacti are blooming, that calls us out into the great outdoors.

9 To the Lighthouse

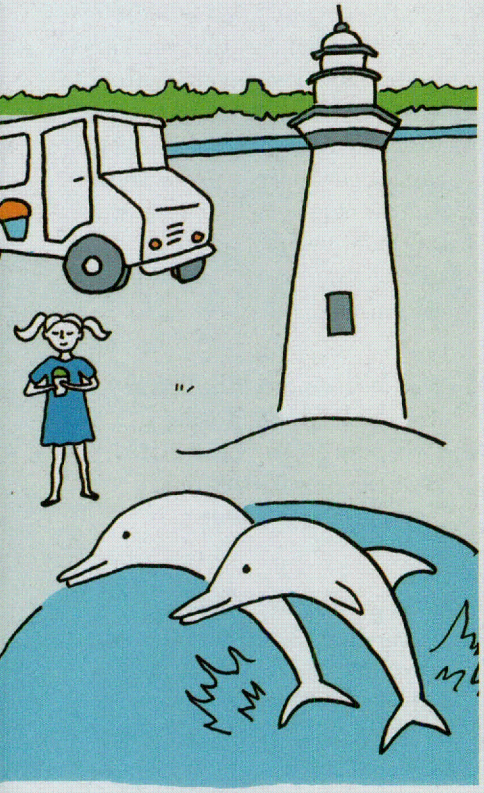
Just steps away from the docks, the 1852 Port Isabel Lighthouse once shepherded boats into harbor through the notoriously difficult-to-find Brazos Santiago Pass. Of Texas' original 16 lighthouses, this is the only one that's open to the public. If you climb the 75 steps to the top, a panoramic view rewards your efforts. At the lighthouse's base is a museum dedicated to the keepers who endured both solitude and storms to keep the light shining for more than 50 years.

Call 956/943-0755; www.portisabellighthouse.com.

8 History's Trail

History also awaits at the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park in Brownsville, where the first battle of the Mexican-American War was fought in 1846. Explore the Visitor Center and stroll three trails, one leading to a battlefield overlook and two that lead to the U.S. and Mexican battle lines.

Call 956/541-2785; www.nps.gov.



7 Gorillas in Our Midst

The Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville is one of the country's best zoos, featuring almost 400 species of animals and more than 200 species of plants. The gorillas are the zoo's most famous residents, and feeding the giraffes is a hit with kids and adults alike. Other animals aren't technically zoo residents: The zoo's lush vegetation attracts wild colonies of herons, egrets, ibises, and storks.

Call 956/546-7187; www.gpz.org.

6 Antiques, Boutiques, and Treats

On the first Saturday of every month, downtown Harlingen—vibrant with art galleries, boutiques, and old-fashioned diners—hosts Jackson Street Market Days, when the streets pulse with bands playing Latin jazz and classic two-steppin' country while vendors offer items ranging from tropical plants to handcrafted guitars.

Call 956/423-5440; www.visitharlingentexas.com.

WILL MOSES: AMERICAN FOLK ARTIST

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5 Mansion of Birds

During spring migration, millions of birds headed north for the summer stop in the Rio Grande Valley to rest and refuel. One of the best places to catch up with the flocks is McAllen's Quinta Mazatlan, a restored adobe mansion whose native plant gardens attract an amazing diversity of rare and beautiful birds, as well as visitors ranging from the casual wanderer to the dedicated birdwatcher.
Call 956/681-3370; www.quintamazatlan.com.

4 Street Food with Style

At McAllen's new outdoor Food Park—located one block southeast of Archer Park—you can listen to live music and enjoy all the best that the Valley's food-truck movement offers, from wood-fired pizzas and fresh-squeezed juices to real-fruit *raspas* that will forever change your conception of a snow cone. And of course you'll find some of the best tacos anywhere.
Call 956/682-2871; www.mcallencvb.com.

Soccer excitement is building for the RGV FC Toros, who will play 30 games in 2016, 15 at the new 9,400-seat stadium in Edinburg.

3 Ready for Some *Futból*

In soccer-crazy South Texas, excitement is building for the RGV FC Toros, a United Soccer League team and an affiliate of Major League Soccer's Houston Dynamo. The Toros will play 30 games in 2016, 15 at the new 9,400-seat stadium in Edinburg. Be ready to sing olé, olé, olé with the crowd!
Call 956/972-1144; www.rgvfc.com.

2 Biking at Bentsen

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission offers bike rentals and more than four miles of trails that wind past the park's peaceful resacas, an observation area, and expansive swaths of undisturbed native habitat. Keep your eye out for some of the park's signature birds, including the green jay and a number of different oriole species.
Call 956/584-9156; www.tpwd.texas.gov.

1 A Retreat in the Trees

At the center of the Casa Luna, one of two B&B lodgings at El Rocio Retreat in Mission, a hundred-year-old mesquite tree serves as the main support of the house. There's no better place than this relaxing, wooded escape to rest and rejuvenate after a full day of springtime outdoor adventure.
Call 956/584-7432; www.elrocioretreat.com. ★

Following *the Thread*

THE TEXAS COTTON GIN MUSEUM IN BURTON

text by **Helen Anders**

THE COTTON BOLL IN MY HAND feels light and delicate, and I easily see how it could translate into the soft, comfy shirt I'm wearing. But, then—ouch!—a sharp burr pricks my hand.

Having snared my curiosity, the Texas Cotton Gin Museum is about to envelop me in cotton lore: how the white puff in my hand speaks of a painful history of slavery; how the cotton gin revolutionized cotton farming without significantly enriching its inventor; how cotton remained an important crop for Cotton Belt farmers after the Civil War; and how a really tiny insect threatens the shirt on my back.

Located in Burton, about 10 miles west of Brenham, the museum and its historic gin explore the history of what remains the state's largest cash crop (even though China and India now produce most of the world's cotton). Burton-area farmers opened the cooperative gin in 1914 to serve the booming cotton industry. It operated for 60 years—first on steam, then oil, then electricity—before closing in 1974. By then, facing the advent of polyester, labor shortages, and government production controls, many small cotton farmers had turned to cattle and dairy.

But in 1992, the old gin again revved its 125-horsepower Bessemer Type IV oil engine and began ginning cotton

THE TEXAS COTTON GIN MUSEUM is at 307 N. Main St. in Burton. Hours are Tue-Sat 10-4 with tours at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Entry is free; tours cost $6 for adults and $4 for students. Call **979/289-3378**; **www.cottonginmuseum.org**.

PHOTO: Kevin Stillman

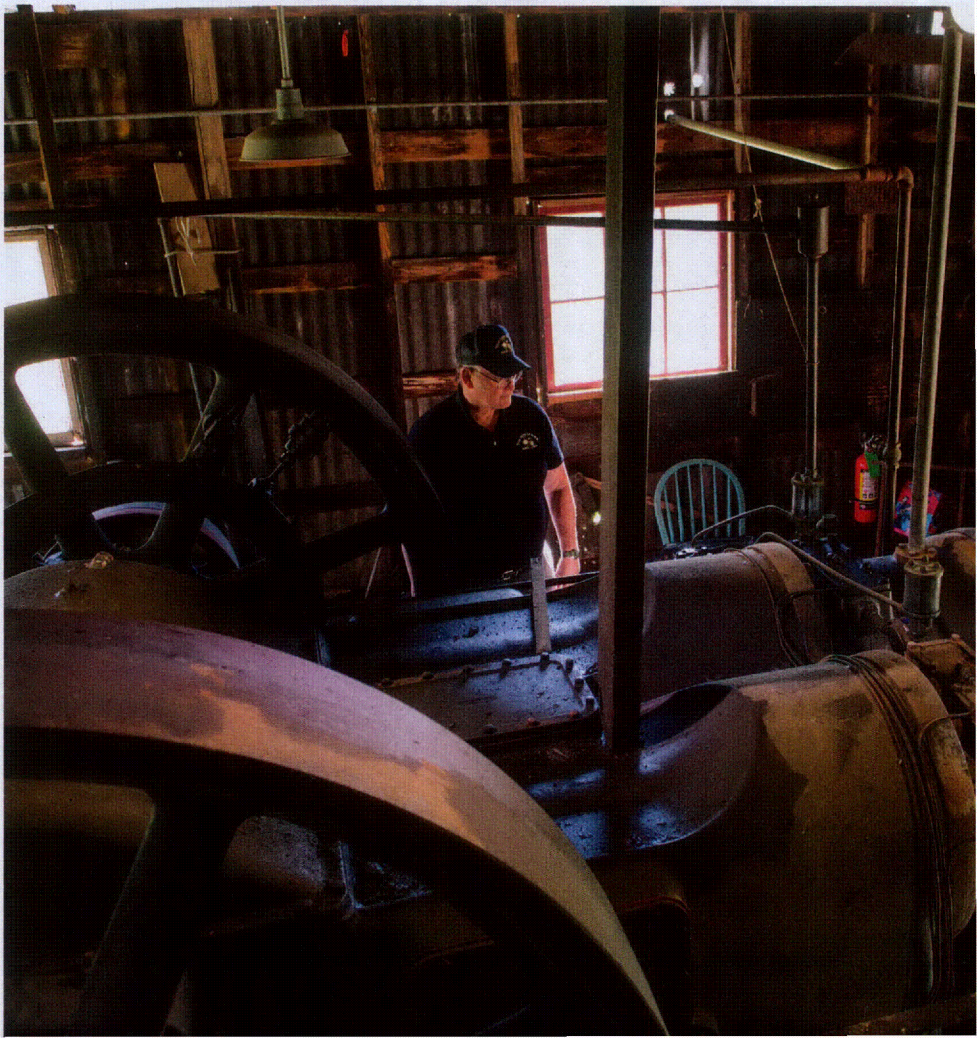
once a year for the annual Cotton Gin Festival, held the third Friday and Saturday in April (April 15-16 this year). The rest of the time, it welcomes tourists for a look at how cotton lint—the white fluff that becomes thread—gets separated from seeds, stems, hulls, and other extraneous matter.

"Our main goal is to keep the legacy of cotton alive for visitors and future generations," says Linda Russell, the museum's director. "It's not just about Burton. It's all the little cotton towns in the Cotton Belt through the ages."

Before my companions and I go out to see the gin, we learn about cotton in the small, one-room museum lined with display cases of cotton and cottonseed products, from thread to coffee filters, Crisco, and cattle feed cubes. We gather around a table in the middle of the room, where Russell passes around cotton bolls for us to feel the soft lint and the hardened, sharp-tipped burr.

She tells us about the old process of handpicking cotton, which was, in a word, painful. Not only did the pickers suffer pricks that made their hands bleed, they also had to drag along heavy sacks. A 12-foot-long sack would hold up to 100 pounds of cotton, Russell says, and men typically filled those sacks several times a day. A good picker could pick 300 to 350 pounds of seed cotton a day.

Plantation owners originally relied on slave labor to separate the hulls and seeds by hand, producing about a pound of cotton and two pounds of seeds in 10 hours. But in 1793, Eli Whitney invented an engine—called "gin" for short—that cleaned as much cotton in one day as 50 people could by hand. The museum has a small hand-cranked model of Whitney's gin—not much bigger than a breadbox—and we



watch as its wire hooks and brushes pull the loose cotton fibers away from the hull and seeds. Cotton gins eventually moved from steam to oil to electricity, and today's technology can yield 100 bales an hour, Russell says.

Shortly after Whitney and partner Phineas Miller patented his machine, one Henry Ogden Holmes patented a similar machine, and the resulting court battle tied up production of the gin. Farmers, Russell says, wound up building their own gins. Thus, Whitney's profits didn't soar. What did soar was the demand for slave labor to pick cotton. After slavery was abolished, many slaves stayed on as sharecroppers and kept picking cotton until 1940 and the introduction of industrial cotton-picking machines.

Texas cotton farming encountered a formidable enemy in the 1890s when the boll weevil moved into the state

GENERATIONS OF GINNING
This oil engine powered Burton's cotton gin from 1925 to 1963—and is still used for annual demonstrations.

PHOTO: Kevin Stillman

from Mexico, destroying crops from the Rio Grande Valley to the Sabine and Red rivers. Its legend looms large, but the beetle itself typically measures around one-sixteenth to one-eighth of an inch. Russell passes around a plastic-encased boll weevil, scarcely bigger than a fruit fly, with a long snout. Adult weevils lay eggs on the cotton plants, and the larvae devour the developing bolls. To keep infestations down, cotton farmers destroy all cotton plants between growing seasons, and mandatory traps track weevil infestations.

Russell serves up more surprises: Although most cotton we see today is white, it also comes in brown, green, red, and blue. American paper currency is mostly cotton: 75 percent cotton, 25 percent linen. That's why we find our bucks whole at the end of the laundry cycle.

What happens to all the cottonseed left over from the ginning? Russell explains that cows like to eat it, and their multiple stomachs can digest it. Cottonseed is also used to make household products such as cooking oils, mayonnaise, toothpaste, and soap.

After a short film about the history of ginning cotton, Jerry Moore, the museum curator, takes us outside behind the museum to see the massive gin building, made of cypress wood and tin.

During the festival, volunteers will gin cotton, but today we look at the machinery as Moore explains the process. We see a carport-like structure at the edge of the building, where a pneumatic tube would suck a wagonload of cotton into the ginning machine. Inside the structure, an oil-driven combustion engine—purchased by the gin in 1925—runs the gin. We climb stairs to see the machines that remove the seeds and hulls from the cotton lint, which then is blown into a press that mashes the cotton 15 feet down to the first floor and forms it into a bale. Bound with metal straps and tagged with a label identifying its bale number and ginning location, an average bale weighs about 500 pounds.

The entire process, we're told, takes about 12 minutes. Then, the bale slides down a chute and back onto the wagon to be taken to market, eventually to wind up on beds, in baths, and well beyond. ★

BURTON COTTON GIN FESTIVAL

The Texas Cotton Gin Museum will gin cotton in its historic 1914 gin at 3 p.m. April 16 as part of the Burton Cotton Gin Festival (April 15-16). The festival also includes a parade, antique tractors and engines, folklife demonstrators spinning and weaving cotton, craft vendors, and more.

Poet's Paradise

POETRY AT ROUND TOP INSPIRES SPRINGTIME BARDS

text by **Clayton Maxwell** *illustration by* **Scott Baldwin**

"CLAYTON, LOOK AT THIS MOTH" shouts the poet Sharon Olds, calling to me across the green lawn in front of the concert hall at Round Top's Festival Institute. Despite having just met her, I am not surprised to have one of the world's most renowned contemporary poets call out to me about a moth on a car. This kind of eager, open delight in small beauties seems normal at Poetry at Round Top, a festival that San Antonio poet Naomi Shihab Nye has dubbed "Paradise for Poets."

In the full bloom of springtime, the festival's home—the romantic, rambling 200-acre campus of Round Top Festival Institute, one of the most respected classical music venues in the country—lends itself honestly to such comparisons to paradise. With venues such as the ornate 1,000-seat Festival Concert Hall, transplanted Victorian homes with wraparound front porches, and a 19th-Century chapel that feels like a sacred temple amid lush green lawns, the campus itself transports you to a poetic state of mind.

The easygoing friendliness of the festival makes it possible to talk to some of the best poets writing today.

The easygoing friendliness of the festival makes it possible to talk to some of the best poets writing today. People I've never met invite me to join them in reciting poetry at lunch, whisk me aside to show me a bird's nest with three pale blue eggs hidden in a rose bush, or simply stop me to tell me about their favorite poetry book. This openness to others and to the world around us defines Poetry at Round Top, where poets of all levels, ages, and styles gather around the proverbial campfire to share their love of words.

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FESTIVAL HILL
Poets from across the nation meet at Round Top Festival Institute in April to share their love of verse.

April now for 15 years, this little bit of lyrical heaven stands out as one of the top poetry festivals in the country, attracting celebrity poets such as last year's Ellen Bass and Richard Blanco, the Cuban-American who wrote and delivered the inaugural poem for President Obama's second inauguration. Two U.S. Poet Laureates have graced the festival: W.S. Merwin, who was here the day before his honor was announced, and Ted Kooser, a Nebraska farmer-turned-poet who drove down to the festival in his truck.

That one of the country's most inspiring poetry festivals should be thriving in Round Top is the result of a shared vision and much diligence by festival cofounders and former Michener fellows Jack Brannon and Dorothy Barnett, along with James Dick, the founder of the Round Top Festival Institute, which has flourished here since 1971.

"James called me about 15 years ago and said, 'Jack, I've always wanted poetry out here. Could you start something up?'" explains Brannon. "And I said yes, because there are a lot of wonderful poets here, so we decided we'd start with Texas poets and see how it goes."

These days, the featured talent comes from across the nation as well as Texas, while the 150-200 attendees hail mostly from the Lone Star State. Both Brannon and Barnett have retired from running the festival, but Co-Director Katherine Oldmixon, a poet and English professor at Huston-Tillotson University, now carries on the mission with Brannon's godson, Jesse Bertron, a poet in his own right.

The festival's offerings are varied, including formal readings and panels on such topics as "The Language of Poetry" in the main concert hall, open-mic readings, and casual readings that seem to happen organically. There are the smaller workshops with the established poets; these are very popular and require advance registration. In

PHOTO: J. Griffis Smith

the chapel, a remembrance ceremony called "Distance Prevails Not" features poetry from artists who have died since the last gathering. There are book signings by the authors, opportunities to purchase books and journals, manuscript-critique sessions with accomplished poets, and intimate readings that take place after dinner over wine and candlelight.

At an evening reading in the stone basement beneath the chapel, I meet Richard Royall, the soft-spoken managing director of the Round Top Festival Institute, who tells me as he pours red wine into my plastic cup: "I know it is spring because the poets have arrived." Along with the bluebonnets dotting the green fields around the Festival Institute campus, I can think of no better harbinger of spring.

"One reason I really do love the festival," says Brannon, "is that it offers poetry at its best. I want people to experience how truly wonderful it can be to hear poetry read out loud, under the right circumstances. Not all poetry readings are wonderful, so one of my goals is to show how very wonderful they can be."

I am lucky enough to sit in on a workshop titled "What is Metaphor?" by one of my very favorite poets, California-based Ellen Bass. This warm, wise woman speaks about how a metaphor invites us to find similarities in a world that is constantly focusing on differences. When we say, "this is like that," she explains, we get a glimpse into the oneness of the world. In the cozy living room of a Victorian home, she gives us objects to hold in our hands, and we then brainstorm for metaphors; for example, a string of amber beads in a plastic baggie becomes a gaggle of debutantes waiting for a party. This is fun.

And then, for the rest of the weekend, I see metaphor everywhere, even though this particular poetic talent is not one I come by easily. And I realize how Bass' exploration into metaphor actually serves as a metaphor for the whole weekend: Here we are, MFA students, professional and aspiring poets, and a few random poetry lovers like me—all seemingly very different in so many ways. But this weekend, deeply steeped in our mutual love of the art, we are united by the happy similarities between us, even if we share something as simple as the sight of a moth on a car. ★

POETRY AT ROUND TOP

This year's event takes place April 15-17 at the Festival Institute. Weekend passes cost $100; daily passes available as well. The 2016 lineup includes Robert Hass, Terrance Hayes, Carmen Tafolla, Dorianne Laux, and others. To register, see **www.poetryatroundtop.org**.

Bespoke Buckles

CLINT ORMS ENGRAVERS AND SILVERSMITHS IN INGRAM

text by **Sallie Lewis**

FOR CLINT ORMS, BELT BUCKLES ARE more than just accessories. The silversmith sees them as a vestige of Western tradition—tools to be used and enjoyed, and then passed along as family heirlooms.

"I believe if you put your best work out, there's a pretty good chance someone is going to feel that when they pick it up," says Orms, whose craftsmanship adorns the belts of such notable Texans as Nolan Ryan, Robert Earl Keen, Lyle Lovett, and Ben Crenshaw, as well as fans around the world.

Behind the showroom, visitors can get a look at the silversmithing process with guided tours of the workshop.

Orms creates these collectibles of silver and gold in a busy workshop in the hamlet of Ingram, about six miles west of Kerrville and a stone's throw from the Guadalupe River. He and other artists in The Old Ingram Loop Shopping District—including bronze sculptor Tom Moss and pastel painter Kathleen Cook—add a splash of color to this neck of the Texas Hill Country.

Inside Clint Orms Engravers and Silversmiths, mounted steer horns evoke ranch life, while framed magazine clippings from the likes of *VOGUE, Texas Farm & Ranch, Newsweek,* and *American Cowboy* depict celebrities wearing Orms' buckles. Dyed belts hang from leather tabs on the walls, and in the center of the store, glass cases

SILVERSMITHING
In Orms' workshop, a craftsman uses an acetylene torch to melt silver before pouring it into an ingot mold.

PHOTO: Will van Overbeek

display dozens of handcrafted silver and gold buckles.

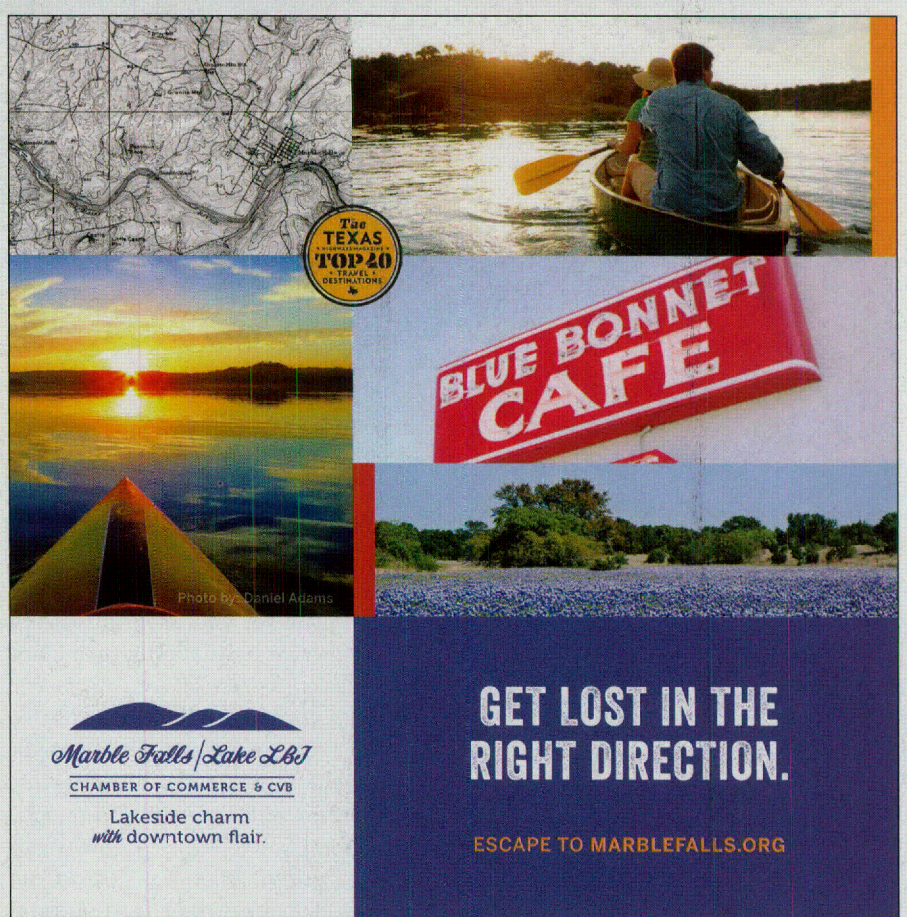
Clint Orms is a calm-natured, soft-spoken man with horn-rimmed glasses and light brown hair tinted with silver—a fitting reflection of his handiwork. Orms grew up in Wichita Falls, surrounded by Western influences from an early age. His father worked at The Cow Lot, the town's premier Western wear store. As a teenager, Orms made leather belts, and by the age of 16, he was working with silver after a family friend and Western sculptor encouraged him to learn.

As the young Orms began doing silverwork in his garage, he soon realized that there was an enduring, timeless, multi-generational component to sterling silver buckles that leather belts did not possess. Over the next 20 years, Orms worked as an engraver in California, Nevada, and Australia, where he was introduced to a wider spectrum of design and marketing. In 1992 he began his business in Dallas, later moving to Houston, and finally to Ingram in 2003.

Behind the showroom, visitors can get a look at the silversmithing process with guided tours of the workshop. Country music blends with the sounds of hammers, screw presses, silver cutters, welding machines, and engraving tools as the silversmiths and engravers work each piece of metal. Next to Orms' desk, a large storage cabinet with thin drawers holds sheets of silver and gold, as well as parts and precious gemstones, like rubies and sapphires. The workshop employs 14 people, ranging in age from 23 to 85.

At the silversmiths' workstations, wooden carousels filled with tools sit alongside instruments like jewelers'

CLINT ORMS ENGRAVERS AND SILVERSMITHS
is at 229b Old Ingram Loop. The shop opens Mon-Fri 9-5 and Sat 10-4. Call in advance for workshop tours, **830/367-7949**; **www.clintorms.com**.



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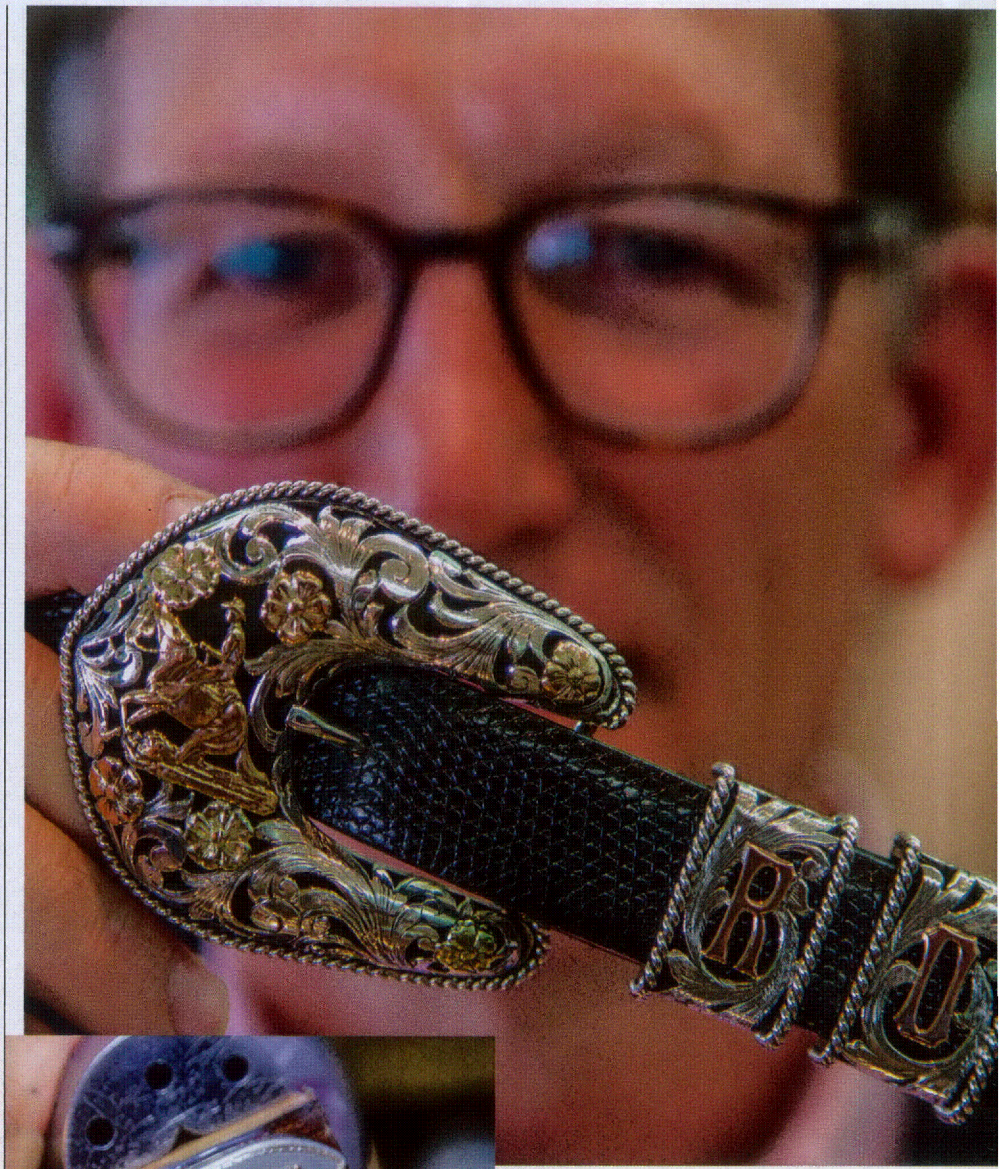

SET IN STERLING
Clint Orms personalizes the designs of his custom belt buckles to reflect the customer's interests.

saws, which are studded with microscopic teeth. With focus and finesse, the craftsmen use these small saws to filigree the silver and bring a depth to the buckle that helps distinguish Clint Orms' style.

Orms says roughly half of his sales are stock merchandise, including belt buckles and other items like hatpins, money clips, cuff links, and bracelets. These items range in price from about $110 to $3,000. The other half of the business is custom, which starts at $200 and can exceed $20,000, depending on labor, materials, and any precious jewels used.

Designing a custom buckle is a journey of creativity and personal expression for both Orms and his customers. The process starts with Orms' hand-drawn design, incorporating his expertise and the customer's personal interests. Orms then customizes the bespoke buckles with individual touches like initials, alma maters, birthstones, and livestock brands.

PHOTOS: Will van Overbeek

After the design, layout, and cutting, the silversmiths solder the various pieces of the buckle together. If the design work includes filigree, this is performed prior to polishing and engraving, patina, and yet more polishing.

Designing a custom buckle is a journey of creativity and personal expression for both Orms and his customers. The process starts with Orms' hand-drawn design, incorporating his expertise and the customer's personal interests.

Orms distinguishes his work with small details, often using natural symbolism in his designs. For example, the scrollwork in his buckles is a subtle replication of the natural spiral patterns found in shells and throughout nature, and his buckle tongues are miniature saddle horns. Another distinction are the designs that Orms puts on the backs of his buckles, each different and echoing motifs from the front. He says one of his greatest satisfactions is watching customers turn his buckles over. "It's like they've discovered something," he says.

Orms' buckles balance Western heritage with a formal aesthetic, and he cleverly carves a Texas mentality into each of them by naming different styles after Texas counties, such as Bexar or Pecos. (Orms wears the Duval, a three-quarter-inch, guitar-shaped buckle featuring the Bar C brand of a friend's ranch in West Texas.) "I love what our buckles do to enhance the image of Texas," he says.

Although each finished product is slightly different because of the nature of the materials and the hands that work them, all represent Orms' commitment to endurance and grace—and his dedication to making buckles that will carry on for generations to come. ★

- San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts Ceramics Invitational Apr. 15-16
- Nelson McGee Memorial Bluegrass Festival Apr. 8-9
- San Angelo Cultural Affairs Council "Uncorked & Untapped" Apr. 29
- Simply Texas Blues Festival May 14

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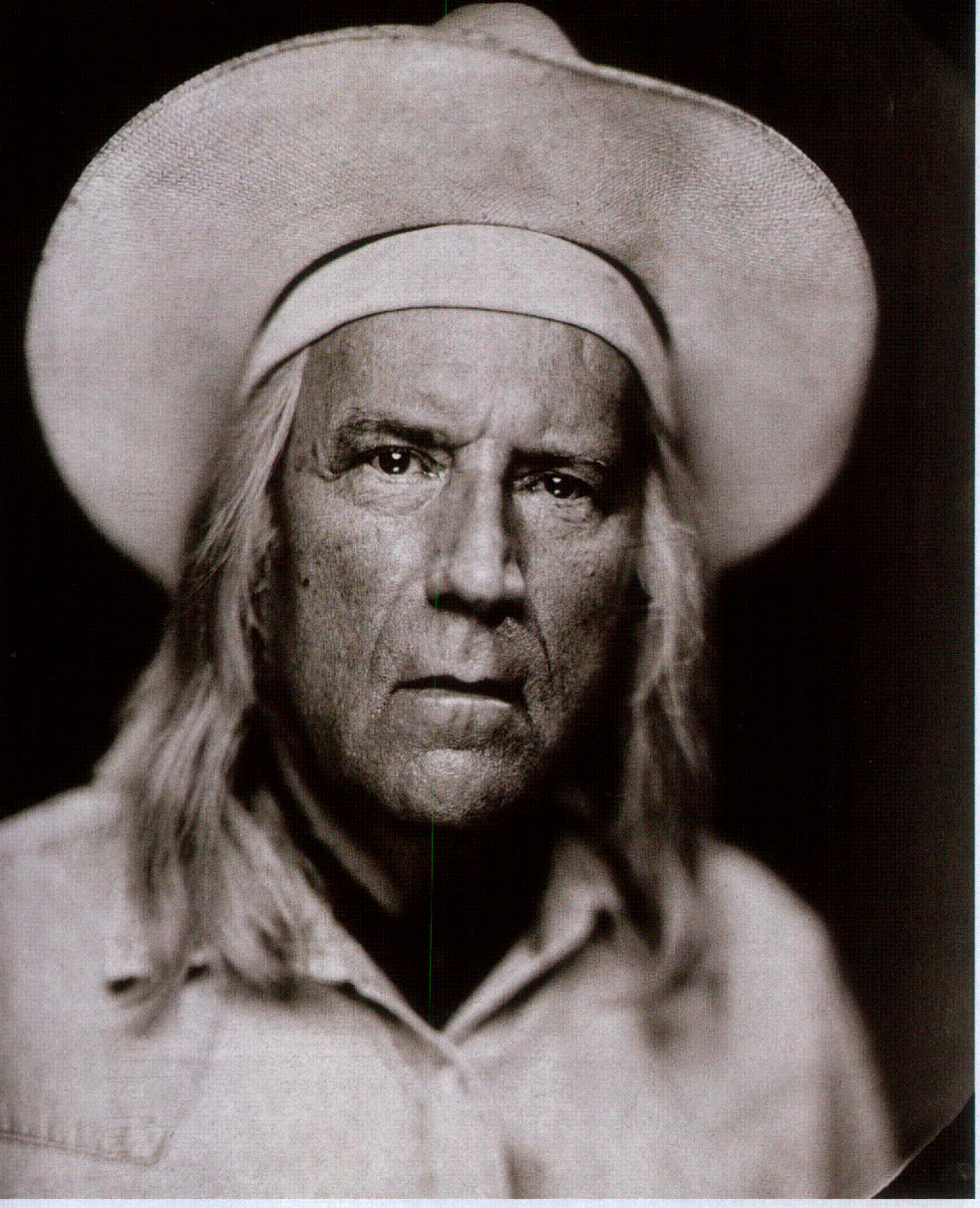


Pure *Resolution*

WHAT WOULD YOUR PHOTO HAVE LOOKED LIKE A CENTURY AGO? WITH A LUMIERE TINTYPE, WONDER NO MORE.

text by **Gene Fowler**

OKAY, I ADMIT IT. I STILL LIKE TO play Cowboys and Indians. I'm fascinated by vintage images of frontier days and the Old West. The modern world with all its geegaws and gadgets is stimulating and fun, but my imagination really sings when it wanders into the territory that cowboy balladeer Don Edwards has described as "west of yesterday."

I was blown away, then, when I discovered the resurgence in popularity of an antique photographic medium called the tintype. Modern-day tintypes are images that *look* like they've captured a moment from pioneer days. Even the name sounds old-timey. I first became aware of the process a decade or so ago thanks to the stunning, handmade images of Texas cowboys taken by photographer Robb Kendrick. And when I learned that a cool cat from England named Adrian Whipp was making tintypes in Austin, I parked my bones in front of his large-format camera with its 120-year-old Schneider lens and faced the ever-so-briefly-blinding light of its flash.

LUMIERE TINTYPE

The Lumiere Tintype studio is at Justine's Brasserie (a restaurant at 4710 E. 5th St.) in Austin, indefinitely. Learn more at www.lumieretintype.com.

Whipp calls his photography studio Lumiere Tintype, and he runs it with his wife, Loren Doyen. It's actually a studio on wheels, housed in a custom-built trailer that can be pulled behind a vehicle. When the studio is not on the road, portrait-seekers flock to it at Justine's Brasserie, a lively French bistro in east Austin. Around the state, the couple has parked the studio and created images at the Webb Gallery in Waxahachie, at Peachtree Gallery and the Charles Adams Studio Project in Lubbock, and at Big Bend Coffee Roasters in Marfa.

The tintype photographic process was patented by a fellow named Hamilton L. Smith of Ohio in 1856. Whipp told me that it started to die out in the early 1900s as traditional cameras became available, but tintypes had a good run for a few more decades as sideshow attractions. "People today are really drawn to the process because we literally make a photograph on a sheet of metal," he continued. "First, I coat the plate with a substance called collodion. It was used as a liquid bandage during the Civil War. Then I soak the plate in silver nitrate to make it sensitive to light. That's why they call it 'wet plate' photography."

After he loads the plate in the camera, he watches his subject for the best moment to hit the shutter. "With the tintype process, the ISO—the measurement of how sensitive film is to light—is very low, so you need a lot of light when you hit the shutter." He wasn't kidding. The flash of light was so bright I feared I had blinked and messed up the

PHOTO: Courtesy Lumiere Tintype

photograph. "You blink a half second after the flash," Whipp reassured me. "The image is always on the metal before people can blink."

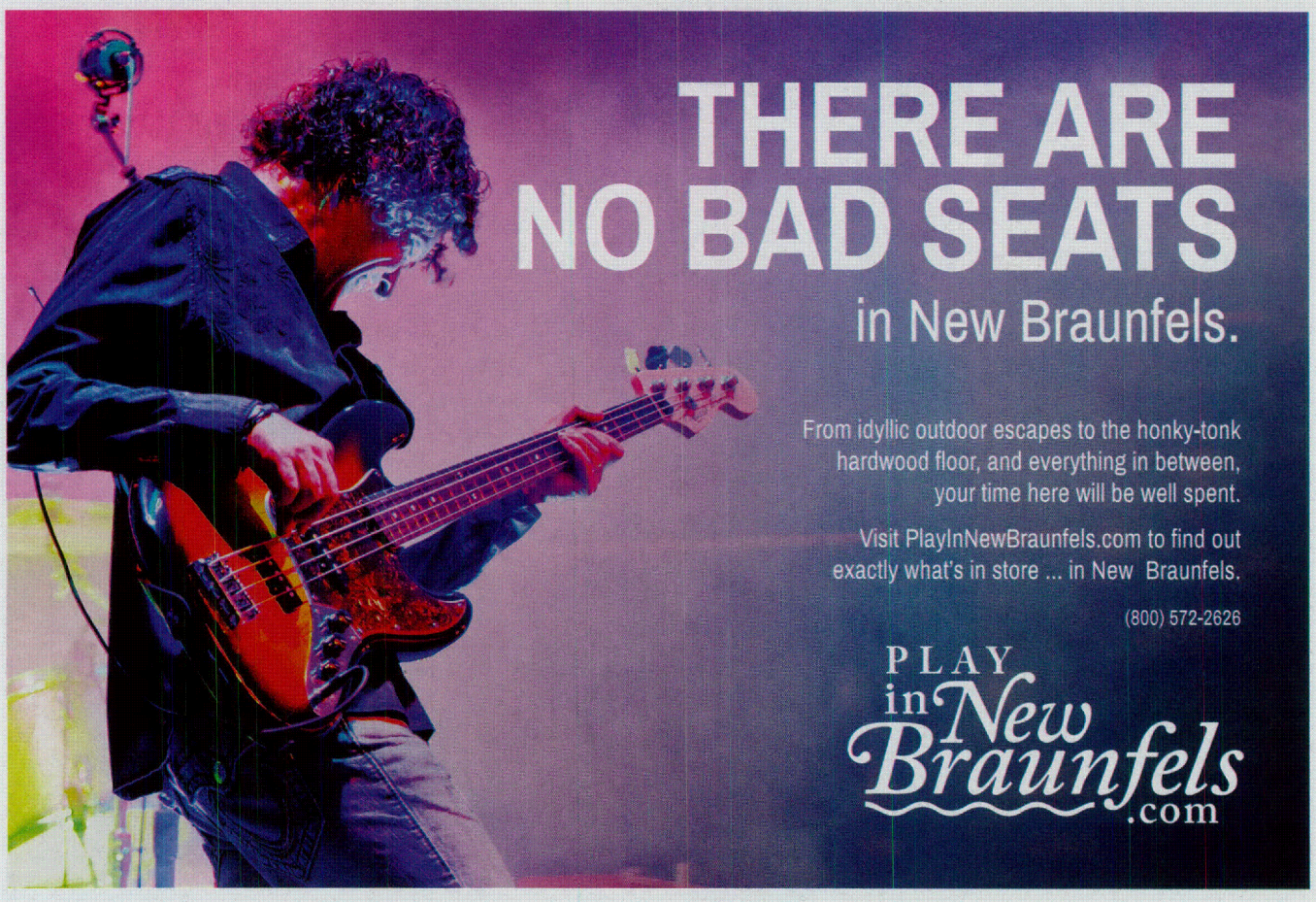
Next, he removes the plate from the camera and takes it to the small darkroom in the studio. "We pour developer on the plate for about 30 seconds," Whipp continued. "It's a recipe of ferrous sulphate and alcohol. Then the image starts to reveal itself, and it takes a minute to see details." He stops the development process by flooding the plate with water and then applies a fixative to make the image stable. "It's often magical when people first see the images," he said. "They're not used to seeing someone make a photograph by hand." As the last step, he dries the plate and varnishes it with shellac, lavender oil, and grain alcohol.

Whipp describes the tintypes as black-and-white images with "coffee and cream tones" that result from the iron in the developer and the golden tint of the shellac varnish. Lumiere tintypes cost $60 for the 5x7-inch size and $110 for 8x10s. The physical image is on an aluminum plate, which takes about 30 minutes to produce, and Whipp also provides a high-resolution digital copy. Instructions for tintype care are included on the back of the plate.

Whipp never imagined he would take up an antique technique when he graduated from Leeds College of Art in 2007. "I had studied analog photography, and when I got out, suddenly everything had gone digital. It was a little disorienting." The Brit first visited Austin for his other passion, BMX biking, met his wife here, and soon was a Texan himself. He got into the tintype business mainly on a whim. "I loved the look of tintypes, old and new, and wanted to learn the process. So I got some books, hit the Internet, and proceeded through lots of trial and error. The transition to full-blown business was actually very rapid, since I immediately fell in love with the process. My friends and family did too, and demanded that I photograph them. It didn't take long for me to start daydreaming about how to open a full-time tintype studio."

When I stopped by Lumiere last December, Whipp was just finishing up a tintype of a dog, and the couple after me was posing for a Christmas card. They were from Los Angeles, and the husband was a film-industry photography director who found the tintype process fascinating. "Honey, this looks great," beamed the wife when she saw their image appear on the plate. "That's pretty rad," the husband agreed.

"That's the reason people love tintypes so much," Whipp said after the two disappeared into Justine's for dinner. "It's a grainless photograph, so there's nothing between you and the image. It's pure resolution." ★



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PLATES

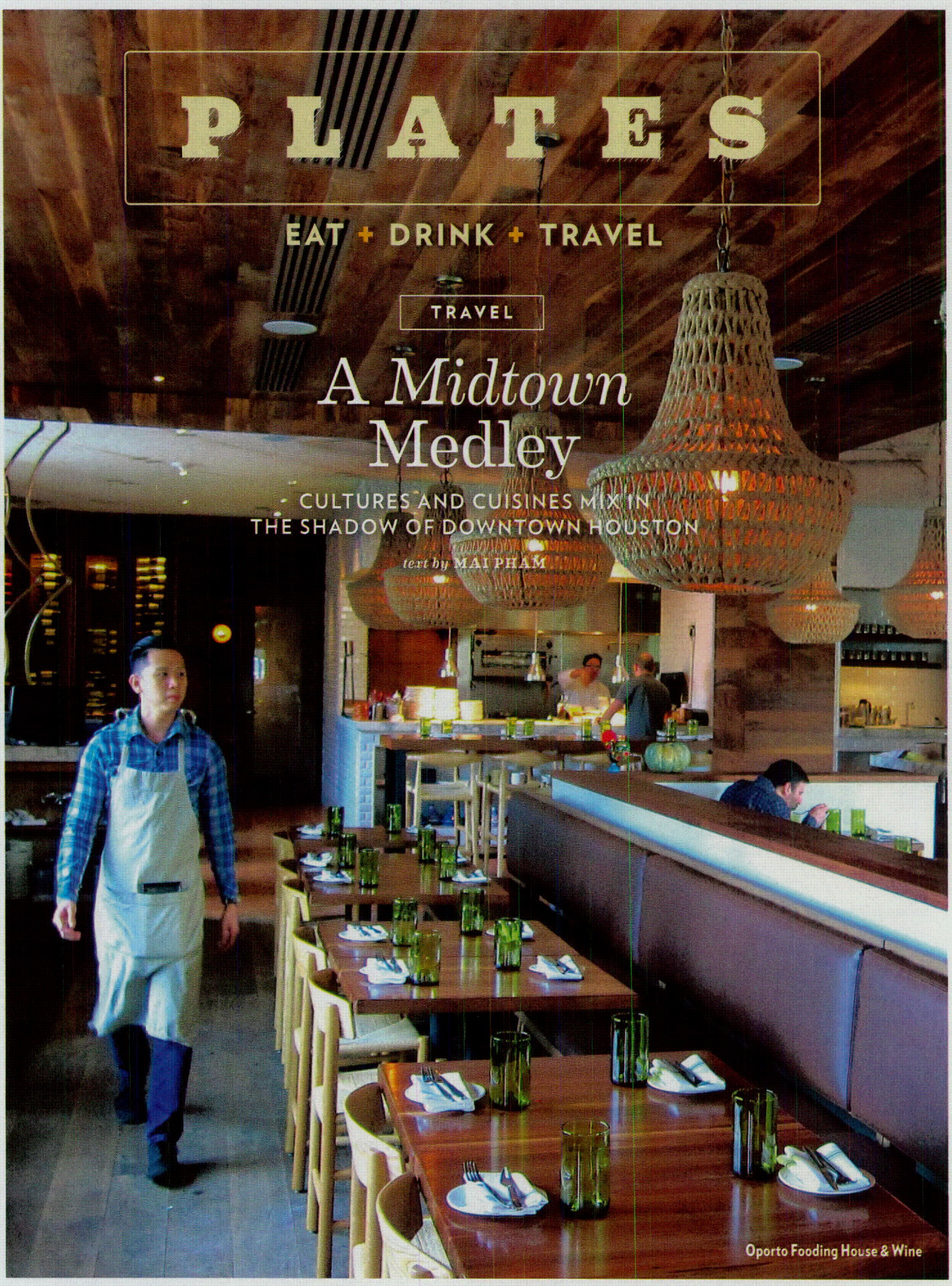
EAT + DRINK + TRAVEL

TRAVEL

A *Midtown* Medley

CULTURES AND CUISINES MIX IN THE SHADOW OF DOWNTOWN HOUSTON

text by MAI PHAM



Oporto Fooding House & Wine

PHOTO: © Mai Pham

MIDTOWN MODERN
At Izakaya, bold murals by tattoo artist Catfish Perez; Chef Jason Gould at Rico's; spicy Portuguese-style shrimp at Oporto.

FROM THE LATE '70S THROUGH the late '90s, Houston's Midtown area—a pie-shaped region south of downtown loosely bordered by Interstate 45 and US 59—was largely known as a hub for Houston's Vietnamese community. For adventurous diners, Midtown back then was the place to go for savory Vietnamese rice plates, steaming bowls of *pho* (Vietnamese beef noodle soup), or an inexpensive and flavorful *banh mi* (Vietnamese sandwich).

Nowadays, though you'll still find a few *pho* and *banh mi* shops along Milam Street, higher rents and increased residential development have changed the landscape of Midtown, which now boasts a strong nightlife as well as some of Houston's trendiest restaurants.

The golden evening sun angles through the north-facing windows when I arrive, casting a glow across a scene that recalls a coastal Portuguese café.

It's close to dusk on a breezy Thursday evening as I approach Oporto Fooding House & Wine, the farthermost restaurant along the pedestrian-friendly, six-block stretch of Gray Street between Smith and Wilson streets. Anchored by a pair of apartment and loft developments, this part of Gray Street boasts numerous retail shops and restaurants, reminding me of Union Street in San Francisco, right down to the hard-to-find street parking. (Fortunately, there are parking lots in the area.)

The golden evening sun angles through the north-facing windows when I arrive, casting a glow across a scene that recalls a coastal Portuguese

PHOTOS: © Mai Pham

café. Beautiful woven chandeliers hang low down the middle of the room, and octagonal terra-cotta floor tiles complement porcelain tiles etched with a royal blue, abstract motif. There's a friendly vibe reinforced by a cheery wood-burning hearth and a lively open kitchen.

This is the sort of place that you could visit solo (it has fabulous bar seating), with a group of friends, or on a date. Tonight, I'm catching up with my girlfriend Katherine over a bottle of Greek wine and assorted shareable plates of Portuguese nibbles known as *petiscos*. We start with a charcuterie plate of paper-thin slivers of Serrano ham, beautifully arranged in an amorphous tuft on a rectangular cutting board beside thin slices of green apple.

We also enjoy the simple and delicious *batatas*—roasted fingerling potatoes that are smashed with a riot of herbs and spicy-sweet tomato chutney; tangerine-tipped Gulf shrimp sautéed with copious amounts of garlic in a spicy *piri piri* pepper sauce enlivened by Madeira wine; and a hearty bouillabaisse-like seafood stew called *caldeirada*, which is rich with the briny flavors of fish, shrimp, mussels, and clams.

On another sunny afternoon, I find street parking right in front of Bagby Park, a pocket park with a dog run, a dancing fountain, a stage for concerts and other performances, and a bold installation of metal letters spelling "midtown." A man is playing catch with his dog, while a couple of young girls are snapping photos of themselves standing in the "O" of the "midtown" letters.

Today I'm in the mood for an old-fashioned burger, so I head to the corner of the park to Rico's Morning + Noon + Night, where I'm met by chef Jason Gould. "It's just simple burgers and hot dogs here," he tells me over a frozen coconut sake, a slushy, low-alcohol refresher with a tropical twist. "We serve breakfast every day, and open until 3 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays," he says, adding that Rico's also serves beer and wine.

I'm tempted by the H-town burger, which is topped with bacon, onion jam, and Monterey Jack cheese, but I end up falling for the Tex-Mex burger, which is topped with chili con queso, guacamole, and spicy salsa, and served with truffled French fries. My burger is juicy, tasty, and righteously messy, and I enjoy it all the more knowing that the meat is raised by local ranchers. I make a mental note to return for breakfast or late-night eats when I'm in the area.

Wanting to walk off a bit of my meal, I set about on foot to see what other interesting eateries I can find within a few blocks of Rico's. Across the street is Gyu-Kaku, a Japanese barbecue restaurant with more than 30 locations worldwide. Around the corner is another burger joint, Christian's Tailgate,

along with a sprawling new barbecue spot called the Republic Smokehouse & Saloon, where I spy outdoor patio seating, flat-screen TVs, and an attractive indoor bar. It's catty-corner from sister restaurant Mr. Peeples, a steak and seafood restaurant known for its opulent and vibrant decor.

Back on Gray Street, I encounter The Fish, which specializes in sushi; the Front Porch Pub; and Cafe Layal Mediterranean Cuisine, as well as neighborhood favorite Coco Crepes, Waffles & Coffee, where I'm tempted to stop in for a dessert crepe. Less than half a block away, though, is award-winning pastry chef Rebecca Masson's Fluff Bake Bar, which entices me with its colorful pastel-hued patio seating and inventive, addictive sweets.

Masson, who competed on Bravo TV's "Top Chef Just Desserts," is a pastry celebrity known in the Houston area as "The Sugar Fairy" thanks to her sublime desserts. Her Fluffernutter sandwich cookies (made with oatmeal, peanut butter, and marshmallow) have a cult following, as do the house-made moon pies known as SOLs (satellites of love) and gingersnaps baked with a wee bit of bacon fat. On weekends, I try not to miss Fluff Bake Bar's legendary bake sales, when Masson always has some sort of weirdly wonderful creation on offer, such as Croque Monsieur pop tarts or pulled-pork Parker House rolls.

On another evening, my girlfriend Christine and I stop in at the trendy new Izakaya for some sake and light bites during happy hour. Izakaya is a Japanese-style gastropub where you'll find a series of bold Japanese *anime* murals by local tattoo artist Catfish Perez. The exuberant decor helps set the stage for Chef Jean-Philippe Gaston's eclectic menu.

We try a happy-hour portion of *hamachi* crudo (yellowtail sashimi), which comes sprinkled with tiny, crispy sardines; it's so unusual and delicious that we order another. The house-made venison hot dog, drizzled with a sweet-and-spicy sauce and served on a pretzel bun, is also fantastic—juicy and flavorful, with a satisfying combination of color and texture.

Midtown Houston used to be in the shadows of downtown Houston, both literally and figuratively, but these days, it's definitely its own destination. Just stroll down Gray Street and take your pick of multiple international offerings that range from Tex-Mex to sushi, Portuguese to Mediterranean, burgers and hot dogs to Texas smokehouse barbecue. Midtown's food offerings are as diverse as the Houston population, and a joy to savor. ★

MIDTOWN HOUSTON
For details on Midtown, see www.houstonmidtown.com.

A Sense *of Plates*

COMFORT FOOD WITH A SIDE OF NOSTALGIA AT PO PO RESTAURANT

text by **Veronica Meewes**

AS A ROAD-TRIP ENTHUsiast with more than a few miles on my trusty Honda, one of my favorite things about traversing this expansive state is discovering new roadside stops, particularly of the edible persuasion.

A pleasant 40-minute jaunt northwest of San Antonio on Interstate 10 will lead to the exit for the community of Welfare, where the feeder lane quickly turns into an unassuming country road leading right up to Po Po Restaurant, a welcome sight for hungry eyes.

The building's weathered stone facade and maroon-striped awnings contrast with the red neon of capital letters on a sign announcing "EATS." Below the sign, an equally straightforward explanation reads "CHICKEN STEAKS SEAFOOD," and the entire scene is framed by the branches of a rather protective-looking live oak.

Nothing can prepare a first-time visitor for the scene inside: thousands of mismatched plates, suspended in meticulous rows across the walls, dividers, and ceiling beams.

But nothing can prepare a first-time visitor for the scene inside: thousands of mismatched plates, suspended in meticulous rows across the walls, dividers, and ceiling beams. And just when you think you've taken it all in, you realize you're still in the lobby and the fantastically obsessive collection continues in the dining room.

Despite the busy decor, the ambience inside Po Po is surprisingly Zen. Big-band music plays softly while dining partners chat leisurely in cream-colored, diamond-tufted booths as Tiffany lamps cast a warm glow above heaping plates of comfort food. This is a place

PHOTO: © Veronica Meewes

DISCOVER Clifton

photo by Kathy Tate

SPRING 2016 EVENTS

March 5
Chamber Annual Banquet

April 8 & 9
The Big Event
Bosque Arts Center

April 21
Dr Deb's Key Hole
Garden Workshop

April 24
Zion United Church
125th Anniversary

May 21
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where you're meant to settle in and stay awhile, and the staff lets you know it as you enter. A sign on the door reads:

"Welcome to Po Po Family Restaurant. We are not fast! We try very hard to be good, cheerful and courteous, but we are not fast! For fast, go to New York. Here we are south of the 'tension line.' So relax. Take time to smell the flowers. And give us the time to prepare your order with tender loving care."

But this spacious dining room, with its high ceilings and sunlight filtering in through large French windows, was not always a place of peace and quiet. It was originally the Nelson Dance Hall, opened by rancher Edwin Nelson in 1929 (as evidenced by the discreet keystone above the entrance).

A platform at the back (now a row of elevated tables) indicates the location of a stage where bands used to play. The lobby where hostesses now heartily greet each guest was once a reception area where soda pop and

It is said that the quirky name Po Po was an abbreviation of Popocátepetl, Mexico's storied active volcano.

hamburgers sold for five cents apiece. And while Po Po now boasts a full bar and cocktail list, the original dance-hall saw its heyday during Prohibition. (Back in those days, I'm told, obtaining alcohol was as easy as purchasing moonshine by the shot or gallon from a bootlegger just outside the entrance.)

But after the Great Depression hit and the economy continued to worsen, most visitors could no longer afford the gas to make it out to the dance hall, let alone food, drink, or tips for the band. Nelson Dance Hall shuttered until a rancher named Edwin "Ned" Houston came along in the early 1930s and purchased the space, renaming it Po Po Cafe. Houston was known for exporting cattle and mules to Latin America, and it is said that the quirky name Po

The famous fried chicken with onion rings and grilled vegetables

PHOTO: © Veronica Meewes

Po was an abbreviation of Popocátepetl, Mexico's storied active volcano.

The restaurant changed hands several more times before 1950, when German immigrants Luther and Marie Burgon left their dairy farm in Minnesota to buy land in Texas, acquiring the property where Po Po was located.

"That's when it became the family restaurant it is today," says Sam Bournias, Po Po's current owner. "Ma" Burgon, as Bournias fondly refers to her, developed the recipes for both Po Po's exquisitely crunchy fried chicken (which she claimed to have shared with Bill Church, who went on to open Church's Chicken in San Antonio) and the popular chicken-fried steak.

"But you would have to specifically ask for gravy on the side because Mr. Burgon would not allow it to be served on the steak," says Bournias. "He was from Germany, where they had schnitzel, and schnitzel didn't come with gravy unless you did a jägerschnitzel, and even then it wasn't a cream gravy."

Though Bournias never had the pleasure of meeting Ma and Luther Burgon, their daughter Ileen worked at the restaurant until she passed away a few years ago, and their granddaughter Carol still drops in from time to time. Both have kept the Burgons' legacy alive through the years.

For years, Ma and Ileen worked side by side in the kitchen and baked treats for the restaurant out of their house next door. "Ileen said she could remember back when they'd have to sleep on the floor because they'd have so many cookie sheets everywhere—on the bed, on the tables, on the kitchen countertop," says Bournias. "Cookies

PO PO RESTAURANT
is at 829 FM 289, off I-10 at Exit #533 (Welfare exit). Open daily for lunch and dinner. Call 830/537-4194; www.poporestaurant.com.

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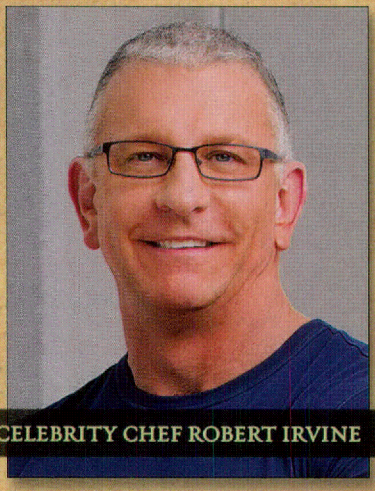

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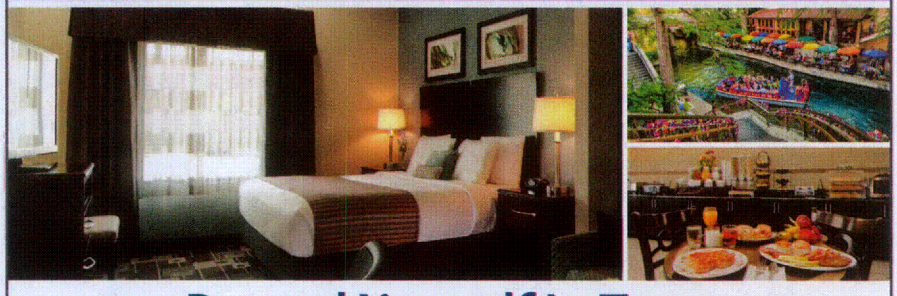

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everywhere! That was back in the day, when they could do that, of course."

Bournias, who bought Po Po in 2004, had been working in the hotel and restaurant business for more than 20 years, in both Dallas and San Antonio, when he decided he wanted to run his own establishment. "So I started looking around and found a place that was for sale," he says, "and the first time I walked in here, I said, 'I think I'm home! I think this is where I want to be for awhile.'"

Since Bournias came aboard, he has made a few changes to the restaurant, such as switching to USDA choice steak and sourcing seafood from Texas vendors in the Gulf of Mexico. These days, instead of offering homemade German baked goods, cooks make their own cobbler and bread pudding from scratch. Soon, Bournias hopes to build a new banquet room to replace the current one. "It was a pole barn where you store hay and they just put walls up. It's not really meant to be a banquet room," says Bournias. "You can only put lipstick on a cow for so long!"

Now that 2,346 plates adorn just about every inch of space in the restaurant, another several hundred have started to accumulate in the current banquet hall. The collection began when the Burgons closed the restaurant each June and traveled around the world, returning with souvenirs in the form of plates. Guests continue to add to the treasury, some shipping dishes from across the globe and others making a pilgrimage to Po Po to carefully unwrap an heirloom they wish to donate.

"People bring in all sorts of different plates that mean something to them," says Bournias. "They understand that, unless somebody takes a crazy elbow to it, it's going to be here for a long, long time." ★

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texashighways.com/webextra.

Thrilling Distilling

A SPIRITED JAUNT TO THE HILL COUNTRY

text by **Arianna Auber**

FOUNDED IN THE 1850S, THE town of Dripping Springs—just west of the booming city of Austin—hosts so many weddings that the Texas Legislature last year designated it as the "official Wedding Capital of Texas." But many people these days know the Dripping Springs area for its surprising concentration of distilleries, breweries, and other drinks-related businesses that allow visitors to taste beer, cider, and spirits right from the source. Once there, visitors find sprawling oak trees, postcard-worthy views, and a welcoming vibe that encourages lingering.

Visitors find sprawling oak trees, postcard-worthy views, and a welcoming vibe that encourages lingering.

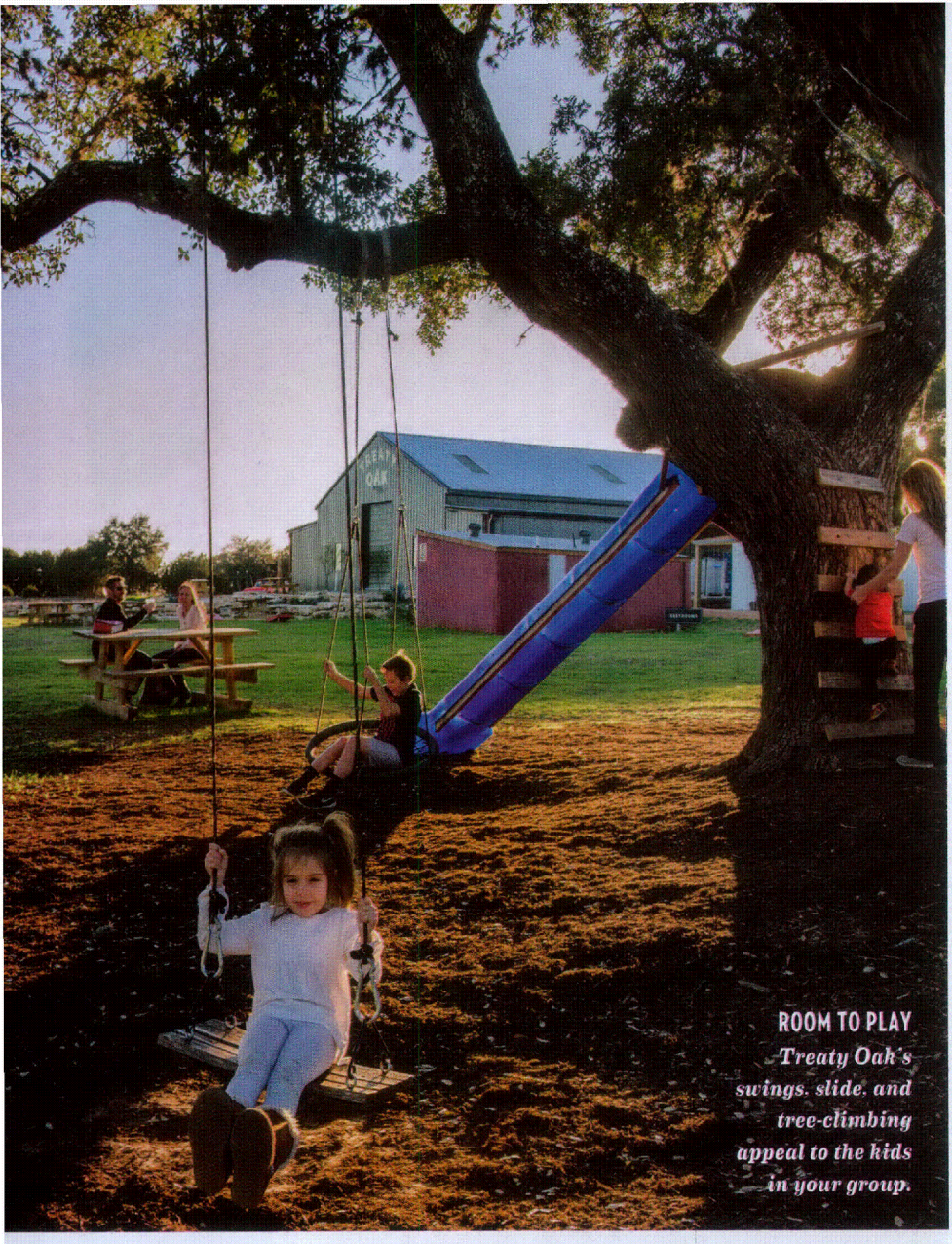
Tiki Thyme, created by Clay Inscoe at Treaty Oak

PHOTO: Michael Amador

This was clear during a recent trip to Treaty Oak Distilling Company, which recently moved from a small warehouse in North Austin to nearly 30 picturesque acres at the edge of the Texas Hill Country. Treaty Oak's new Ranch, which opens to the public Friday through Sunday for tours, tastings, and cocktails, has a lot to offer besides drinks: live music on weekends, picnic-friendly food, games such as washers and disc golf, and even a twice-monthly helicopter tour that'll give you a bird's-eye view of such area landmarks as Hamilton Pool and Lake Travis.

A good place to start a distillery visit is at the gift shop, where you can enjoy a guided sampling of the various spirits Treaty Oak produces, including the popular Starlite Vodka, Treaty Oak Rum, Red-Handed Bourbon Whiskey, Waterloo Gin, and Waterloo Antique, an unusual barrel-aged gin that can hold its own against whiskey in a cocktail. Here, too, is a wide assortment of bar necessities for sale, including cocktail books, jiggers and shakers, syrups and bitters, and Treaty Oak shirts, jackets, and hats.

On my last visit to Treaty Oak, however, my companion and I headed straight to the bar in the Rickhouse, an airy metal-and-wood building with picnic tables and a couple of couches positioned amid the rows of stacked barrels aging spirits. At the back is a long wooden bar where you can order charcuterie boards, duck confit tacos,



ROOM TO PLAY *Treaty Oak's swings, slide, and tree-climbing appeal to the kids in your group.*

vegetable plates, and other picnic-friendly fare from a menu created by Chef Jason Tolleson, formerly of the Four Seasons.

Treaty Oak's drink menu frequently changes "to give guests variety weekend to weekend," notes Daniel Barnes, Treaty Oak's founder, but some drinks, like the Pepperita (Treaty Oak rum, jalapeño, lime juice, and sparkling water), are year-round staples. For Treaty Oak's spring menu, chef and mixologist Clay Inscoe dreamed up a handful of new libations, including a refresher called the Tiki Thyme, with pineapple brandy, tamarind, pineapple juice, and coconut water, garnished with a sprig of thyme.

One of Texas' many radiant, cloudless afternoons will probably beckon you outside, as it did us. We sat at a picnic bench in the shade of a massive oak tree, our feast between us. "There's booze in the barbecue sauce," my friend exclaimed as he dug into his burger. Even my brisket sandwich had a special touch: gin-brined pickles, which imparted a sweet and herbal crunch. As we dined, we watched the activity blossom around us: a group of friends tossing beanbags near the fire pit, a playful Great Dane puppy leading a young couple around the expansive lawn in front of the distillery, a trio of kids squealing beside a slide in a play area just for them.

Barnes, like some of the other beverage producers in the Dripping Springs area, has tapped into the laid-back charm of the countryside to create something magical. "It's an element of escape for some folks, getting food and drink in a Hill Country atmosphere, and we wanted to provide that kind of experience," Barnes says.

Just up the road at a complex called Craftsman Park, Argus Cidery, Revolution Spirits, and Last Stand Brewing offer additional spirited adventures. Argus specializes in champagne-style ciders produced mostly from Texas-grown apples. On weekends, you can sample these ciders, along with fermented libations like Argus' Tepache—an effervescent, slightly salty drink made from pineapple—in a tasting room decorated with vintage photos and a hand-strung chandelier.

Nearby is Last Stand Brewing, a year-old brewery that recently added fermenters to keep up with demand. Friday through Sunday, a taproom and shaded beer garden open for tastings of Last Stand's four popular year-round brews, such as its delicious Coffee Porter and Belgian Pale Ale, along with limited-production beers and special releases. "By springtime," says co-owner Mandi Richardson, "we hope to have a food truck out here, so you can lounge in our Adirondack chairs, sample some of our beers, have some food, and listen to live music during taproom hours."

Revolution Spirits, adjacent to Last Stand, opened at Craftsman Park in 2013 and released its first bottles of gin in late February 2014. "We sold our entire batch in one day," says co-founder Mark Shilling, "and it happened to be Washington's birthday. I didn't think about it at the time, but Washington was not only our first president; he was also our greatest revolutionary

LEAVE THE DRIVING TO US

Austin Tour Company offers round-trip transportation on weekends from downtown Austin to Treaty Oak and Deep Eddy. Treaty Oak bus tours (Saturdays, $30) include a tasting flight in addition to a tour of the distillery and ranch. Deep Eddy bus tours (Sundays, $25) include a cocktail at the distillery bar. See **www.austintourcompany.com**.

PHOTO: Michael Amador

A SPIRITED HILL COUNTRY TRAIL

Treaty Oak Distilling Company's Ranch, 16604 Fitzhugh Rd. (Dripping Springs). www.treatyoakdistilling.com.

Argus Cidery, 12345 Pauls Valley Rd. (Austin). www.arguscidery.com.

Last Stand Brewing, 12345 Pauls Valley Rd. (Austin). www.laststandbrewing.com.

Revolution Spirits, 12345 Pauls Valley Rd. (Austin). www.revolutionspirits.com.

Jester King Brewery, 13187 Fitzhugh Rd. (Austin). www.jesterkingbrewery.com.

Deep Eddy Distilling, 2250 E. US 290 (Dripping Springs). www.deepeddyvodka.com.

Twisted X Brewing Co., 23455 W. RR 150 (Dripping Springs). www.texmexbeer.com.

San Luis Spirits, 5330 Bell Springs Rd. (Dripping Springs). www.drippingspringsvodka.com.

and also a substantial distiller of spirits. We look back at it now and think of it as serendipity." These days, along with two kinds of gin, a coffee liqueur, and fruit-based liqueurs, Revolution is experimenting with brandies, bitters, and different barrel-aging techniques. Open for tours and tastings on Saturdays and by appointment, the distillery plans to add a cocktail bar and a formal tasting room later this year.

Requisite with any trip out to Dripping Springs are stops at Deep Eddy Distilling, as well as Twisted X Brewing Company and San Luis Spirits, which makes both vodka and gin. Nearby, Jester King Brewery, which specializes in ales that use naturally occurring yeast, occupies a bucolic spot in the hinterlands between Austin and Dripping Springs. Founder Jeff Stuffings cares so much for this land that the brewery recently purchased 58 surrounding acres to ensure it won't be developed. In fact, Jester King incorporates elements of the land straight into its beer.

"We use well water, locally malted barley, and a lot of local fruits and herbs and spices, but we get our sense of place in the beer world from the microbes that are unique to this little part of the Hill Country," says Stuffings.

With such close proximity to each other, the businesses out here share resources, collaborate on projects, and often send visitors to their neighbors down the road.

"Every weekend, Jester King gets a huge volume of folks, and they always send people down to us," says Revolution Spirits' Shilling. "Treaty Oak has been doing the same, and when people visit us here, we always suggest they visit our neighbors as well. It's a great sense of community. We all help each other out, and people take notice." ★

GONZALES, TEXAS
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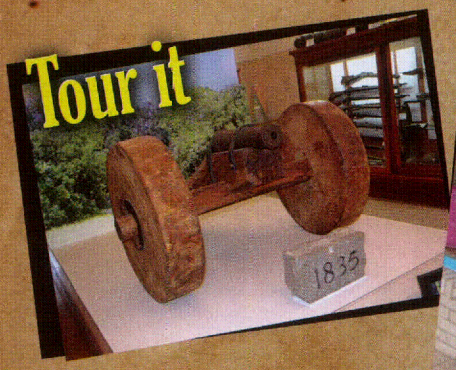

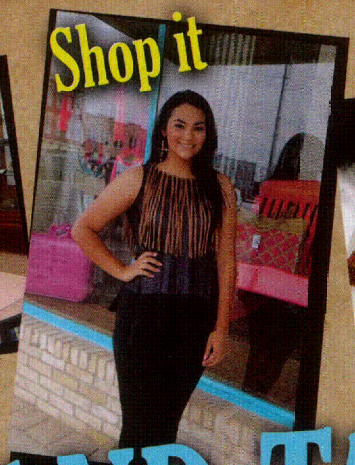

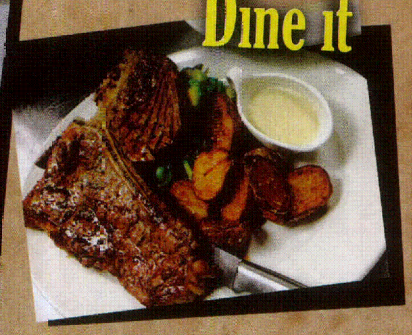

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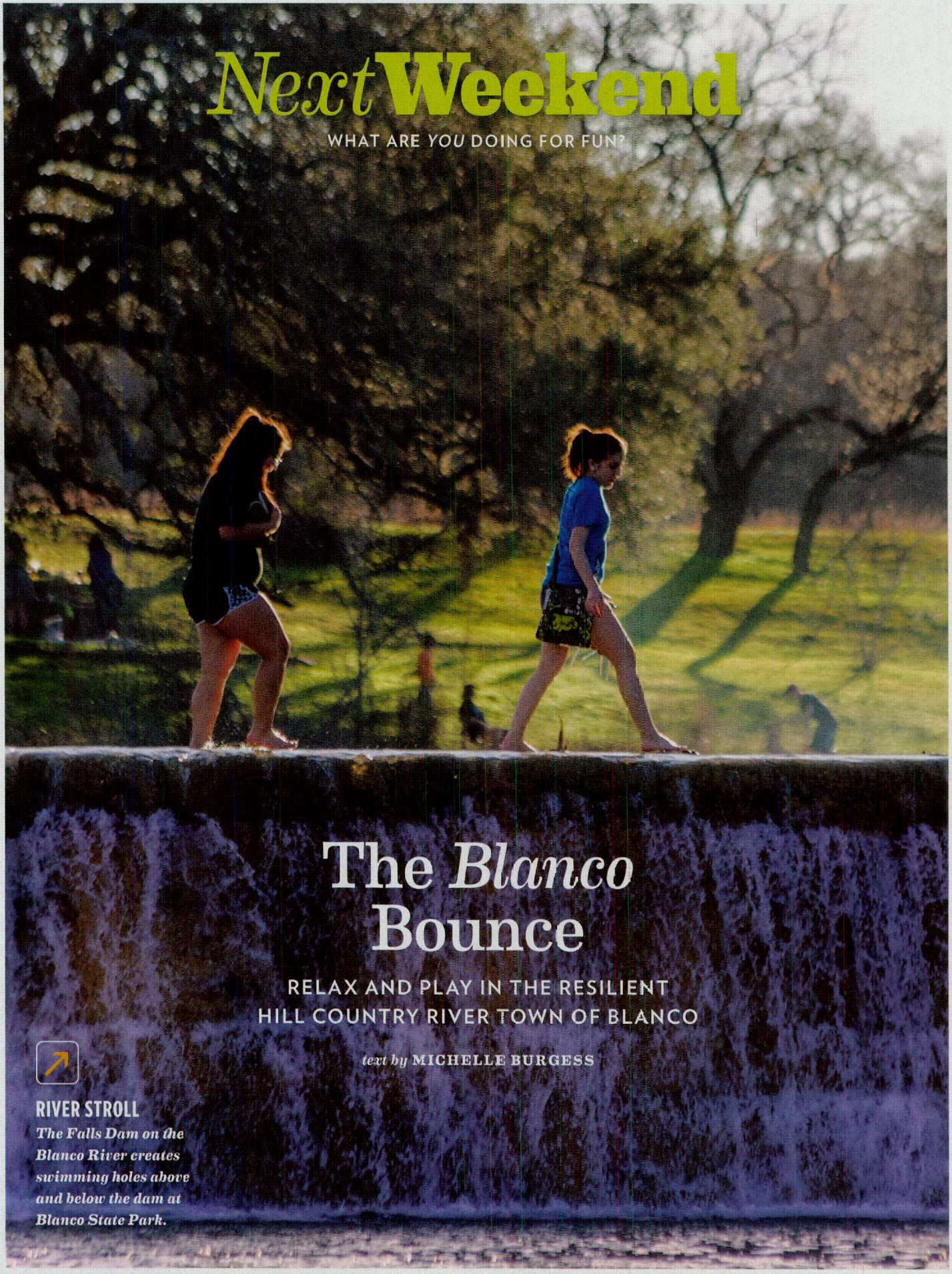


The *Blanco* Bounce

RELAX AND PLAY IN THE RESILIENT HILL COUNTRY RIVER TOWN OF BLANCO

text by MICHELLE BURGESS

RIVER STROLL
The Falls Dam on the Blanco River creates swimming holes above and below the dam at Blanco State Park.

PHOTO: Will van Overbeek

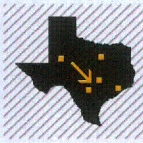
I **WAS SITTING IN AN ADIRONDACK CHAIR** on the back porch of my rental cabin at Blanco Settlement, feet up on the rail, as a thunderous rainstorm pounded the tin roof and swelled the gray-green waters of the Blanco River, less than 60 feet below my vantage. Checkout time had passed, but visibility on US 281 was dangerously compromised, so for the time being, I was stuck. As far as problems go, though, it was a pretty good one to have—especially considering that two weeks later, the rains fell with considerably more force, destroying the camping facilities just a few yards from where I sat and sweeping away the bridge I crossed to get home.

The 2015 Memorial Weekend flooding killed more than two dozen people across the state, wreaked damages in the tens of millions of dollars, and catapulted Wimberley, San Marcos, and Blanco into the national spotlight. The least populated of the three with fewer than 1,900 residents, Blanco is also the most remote and rural of these hardest-hit areas. But while their numbers are small, those who call Blanco home have proven to be a mighty force when it comes to taking care of their town. Repairing its structures and healing its citizenry in the floods' aftermath have been no different.

Blanco is a picturesque and manageable destination year-round—there's plenty to do but not so much that visitors have to forsake some attractions for lack of time.

"Following the storms, Blanco residents looked after each other not just as a community, but as a family," said resident Connie Barron. "From the first call to open an evacuation center until victims were well into the rebuilding

***The* DISTANCE *to* BLANCO**



Austin	San Antonio	Houston	Fort Worth	Big Spring
50 miles; 1 hour	*50 miles; 1 hour*	*205 miles; 3.25 hours*	*215 miles; 3.5 hours*	*265 miles; 4.25 hours*

Lunch at Redbud Cafe

process, neighbors pitched in to give help wherever it was needed."

A return trip eight months later reveals few visible scars and a welcoming community still eager to parlay the town's natural beauty and historic charm into a destination that tourists think of when planning their vacations. Blanco Settlement—the most heavily damaged lodging facility in and around town—is again operating at 100 percent. The riverside cluster of well-appointed cabins, RV parking pads, and an eclectic gift shop sits less than two miles east of the town square, the hub of activity for the 158-year-old burg. Despite the square's location along busy US 281, in years past most Hill Country tourists didn't regard Blanco as more than a well-situated place to stop for gas.

But then, in 2004, the town launched the annual Blanco Lavender Festival (June 10-12, 2016), which has grown into a weekend destination for visitors to Central Texas. And in 2006, Real Ale Brewing Company outgrew the basement digs it had occupied on the town square for 10 years and built a new brewery about 1.5 miles north to accommodate the uptick in visitors it attracted when craft beer became a movement. Along the way, a core group of Blanco residents decided that their town could be, and should be, more than just a quick pit stop.

They are the folks who kept Blanco State Park open when it was threatened with closure in 2011, and whose efforts fuel a never-ending roster of improvement projects. It is thanks to volunteers that Blanco has a springtime Arts in the Park series with weekly live music in downtown's Bindseil Park, and that the Old Blanco County Courthouse is open as a historical landmark and event venue more than 125 years after the county seat moved up the road to Johnson City.

Barron and fellow volunteers stage the annual Wild Woman Weekend, an April event launched in 2012 that draws women of all ages from across the country to enjoy a mix of outdoors,

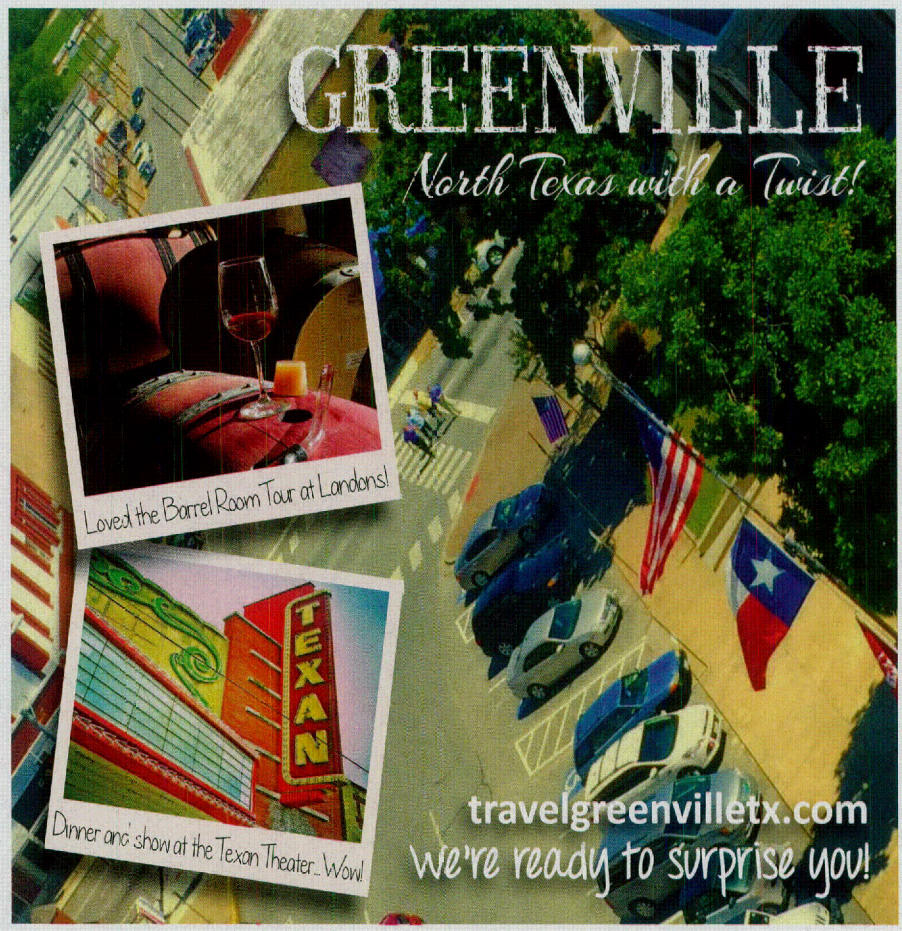
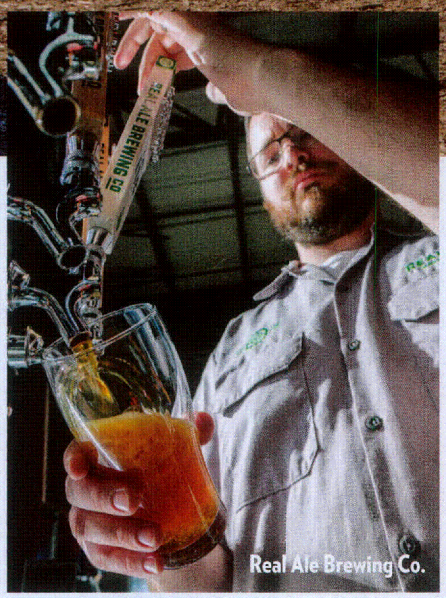


PHOTO: Will van Overbeek

The Pine-Moore Town at the Buggy Barn Museum



Real Ale Brewing Co.

artistic, and social activities to benefit several of the town's nonprofits. Billed as "the ultimate gal-pal road trip," this year's event (April 8-10) features a 5K run and "Mimosa Mosey," fishing lessons, kayaking, live music, outdoor movies, casino night, and wine and beer tastings.

For first-time participants, Wild Woman Weekend serves as an introduction to Blanco's hotels, restaurants, shops, and other attractions. Organizers hope that many will return to enjoy 105-acre Blanco State Park, set on the banks of the Blanco River and completely contained within the city limits. Locals are quick to point out that it is the only state park where visitors can hike, fish, paddle, and swim all day, then walk across the road to have dinner in the middle of town before returning to camp for the night. Like the town that surrounds it, Blanco State Park is small but packs a big punch. On just under two miles of looping, paved road, the park is lush, accessible, and an ideal choice for families and novice or reluctant campers.

More natural beauty is on display at the area's two lavender farms, where customers cut their own bunches of the fragrant flower that has come to be associated with Blanco over the past two decades. Hill Country and Imagine lavender farms' hours are seasonal, primarily concentrated in the blooming season that begins in mid-May and some years extends through Independence Day, but both companies' products are available all year in local shops and online.

Though the lavender fields bloom seasonally, Blanco is a picturesque and manageable destination year-round—there's plenty to do but not so much that visitors have to forsake some attractions for lack of time. Unlike some larger towns, diminutive Blanco lends itself to a clear-cut itinerary: breakfast at Chess Club Café, lunch at Redbud Cafe—or maybe the 1948 Blanco Bowling Club Cafe, if you're hoping to get in a few frames of 9-pin—and dinner at Old 300 BBQ. In between, there's shopping to be done, most notably at shops such as Brieger Pottery and Liz on the Square (with everything from motorcycle leathers to scented candles).

History buffs will appreciate the Buggy Barn Museum, which showcases one of the largest collections of restored 19th- and early 20th-Century horse-drawn vehicles in the country. When not being used in movies or for private events, the carriages are displayed at the jam-packed museum compound. Located just north of the square on US 281, the museum grounds also feature an Old West town façade called

PHOTOS: Will van Overbeek

the Pine-Moore Town, where special events are held throughout the year. November's Hill Country Western Showcase features cowboy music, gunfighter reenactments, blacksmithing demos, and the like.

Guests will find a different sort of entertainment just half a mile from the museum at the Real Ale brewery, which produces 15 year-round beers. Only available in Texas and named for its unfiltered, unpasteurized brewing process, Real Ale has been crafting beer in Blanco since 1996 using water from the Blanco River. Free tours of the facility—housed in a white, metal-sided building—are offered twice a day on Fridays and Saturdays. Last year, Real Ale built a sleek new tap room (open Thursdays-Saturdays) with long wooden tables, broad windows, and 14 Real Ale beers on tap.

At press time, the blue-green Blanco River flows at a healthy volume, meandering around and through town, showing neither the barrenness of past droughts nor the menace of last year's disaster. A new bridge on Ranch Road 165 is scheduled to open this spring, and in the meantime, a temporary detour keeps Blanco Settlement in business and residents connected. Those residents hope that as their town's reputation grows, it will be as the welcoming, must-see Hill Country destination they have worked so lovingly to nurture. ★

BLANCO

is located on US 281, about 50 miles west of Austin and 50 miles north of San Antonio. The Blanco Chamber of Commerce provides visitor information at its office at 312 Pecan St. (Mon-Fri 9-5). Call **830/833-5101**; **www.blancochamber.com**. The Old Blanco County Courthouse also houses a visitor center, which opens Mon-Sat 10-4 and Sun noon-3. Call **830/833-2211**; **www.historicblanco.org**.

We Love our Mudbugs

plus Top Places to Enjoy 'em

Photos by ERIC W. POHL

By ROBB WALSH

Use your mallet! A crawfish boil at the Boiling Pot, Rockport/Fulton.

The Crawfish

at Larry's French Market in Groves looked like a pile of bright red miniature lobsters heaped on a beer tray. I got mine with boiled potatoes, corn-on-the-cob, and a crab. The boiled crabs are monsters here—the biggest I've seen in a Texas restaurant in years; mine measured more than seven inches across.

It's a messy business, eating crawfish. You twist the head away from the body and then squeeze the succulent tail meat out—or finish extracting it with your front teeth. True aficionados also suck the orange fat and spicy liquid from the head. A plastic lobster bib is never a bad idea, but I made do with a roll of paper towels to mop the orange liquid from my bearded chin. Each morsel is delicious, but it takes quite a while to make a meal out of "mudbugs," as they are known affectionately among Cajuns.

As I worked on my crawfish from the vantage point of my picnic table, I took in the scene. There was a long buffet line stocked with steaming mounds of savory Cajun food, including hush puppies, dirty rice, links of boudin and sausage, and fried seafood of many kinds. On the wall were floor-to-ceiling murals of bayou scenes, wildlife, and a rendition of a fishing camp with a boat moored outside. Up front, by the cash register, customers could buy Cajun cookbooks and spices. Way back in the distance, I could make out a bandstand.

Is Larry's French Market & Cajun Restaurant the best place to eat crawfish in the state? You could ask owner Larry Judice, but you'd better have a couple of hours to kill. That's his fishing boat in the mural—and his fishing camp in Louisiana. Larry can wax eloquent about crawfish, crabs, zydeco, and the best place to catch fish in the Gulf of Mexico—all in a lilting Southeast Texas-influenced Cajun accent. The gift of gab runs in the family.

A neon crawfish lights the way to Larry's French Market in Groves. Cajun Kitchen in Houston has some of the spiciest mudbugs in Texas.

A PLASTIC LOBSTER BIB IS NEVER A BAD IDEA, BUT I MADE DO WITH A ROLL OF PAPER TOWELS TO MOP THE ORANGE LIQUID FROM MY BEARDED CHIN.

Photos on this spread: Pinchers in El Campo farms its own crawfish and brings them live to holding tanks at the restaurant, where kids and adults alike can watch the mudbugs' antics.

Larry told me that it was his father, A.J. Judice Jr. (better known as "the Crazy Frenchman") who first sold crawfish in Texas in the 1960s. He stocked them at Judice's French Market, the Port Arthur predecessor to the current business, which was also run by Larry's grandmother, Lariza Judice (known variously as "Mawmaw," "Larry," and "Mawmaw Larry"). When you visit Larry's French Market today, you can see a caricature of the Crazy Frenchman in his signature red butcher's apron and black beret.

To draw attention to his live crawfish business, A.J. brought the dubious sport of crawfish racing to Texas from Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. Legend has it that A.J.'s champion racing crawfish "Taunte La La" won him some major purses. In the 1960s, Texas Governor Preston Smith appointed A.J. Texas Crawfish Racing Commissioner to "ensure that no unscrupulous characters got into the crawfish racing industry in the great state of Texas."

Texans eat an enormous amount of crawfish today, but that hasn't always been the case. "We tried serving boiled crawfish when we opened our first restaurant in 1976, but nobody would eat them—we ended up using them as a garnish or throwing them away," remembers Jim Gossen, whose Louisiana Foods company is one of the state's largest crawfish suppliers.

Crawfish come from fresh water, not salt water. Their culinary fame began in an enormous swamp in Western Louisiana called the Atchafalaya Basin, where crawfish were easily collected after spring floods. Wild crawfish from the Atchafalaya Basin are still considered the best on the market, but crawfish are also farmed in rice fields in low-lying areas of Louisiana and Texas.

There is a crawfish farm near El Campo that provides mudbugs to a sister restaurant called Pinchers. With its cheerfully painted walls, mounted fish décor, and airy porches lined with potted plants, Pinchers is a step up from your average crawfish shack. Live crawfish are available here from January to August, which is generally considered the crawfish season in Texas. (Restaurants that sell

TOP CRAWFISH JOINTS

LARRY'S FRENCH MARKET & CAJUN RESTAURANT, GROVES

Larry's French Market is where the Texas crawfish business got its start; owner Larry Judice is the third generation of the Judice family to sell crawfish in Southeast Texas. Come by on a weekend night and enjoy live music and dancing. See www.larrysfrenchmarket.com.

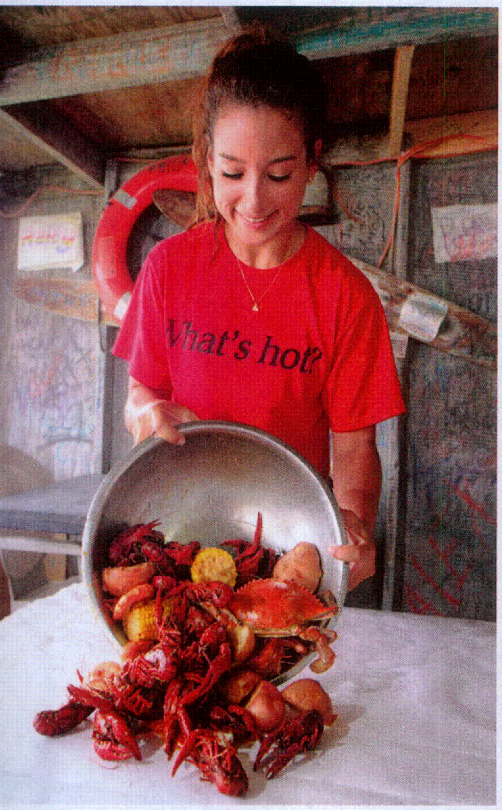
JUJU'S CAJUN CRAWFISH SHAK, FANNETT

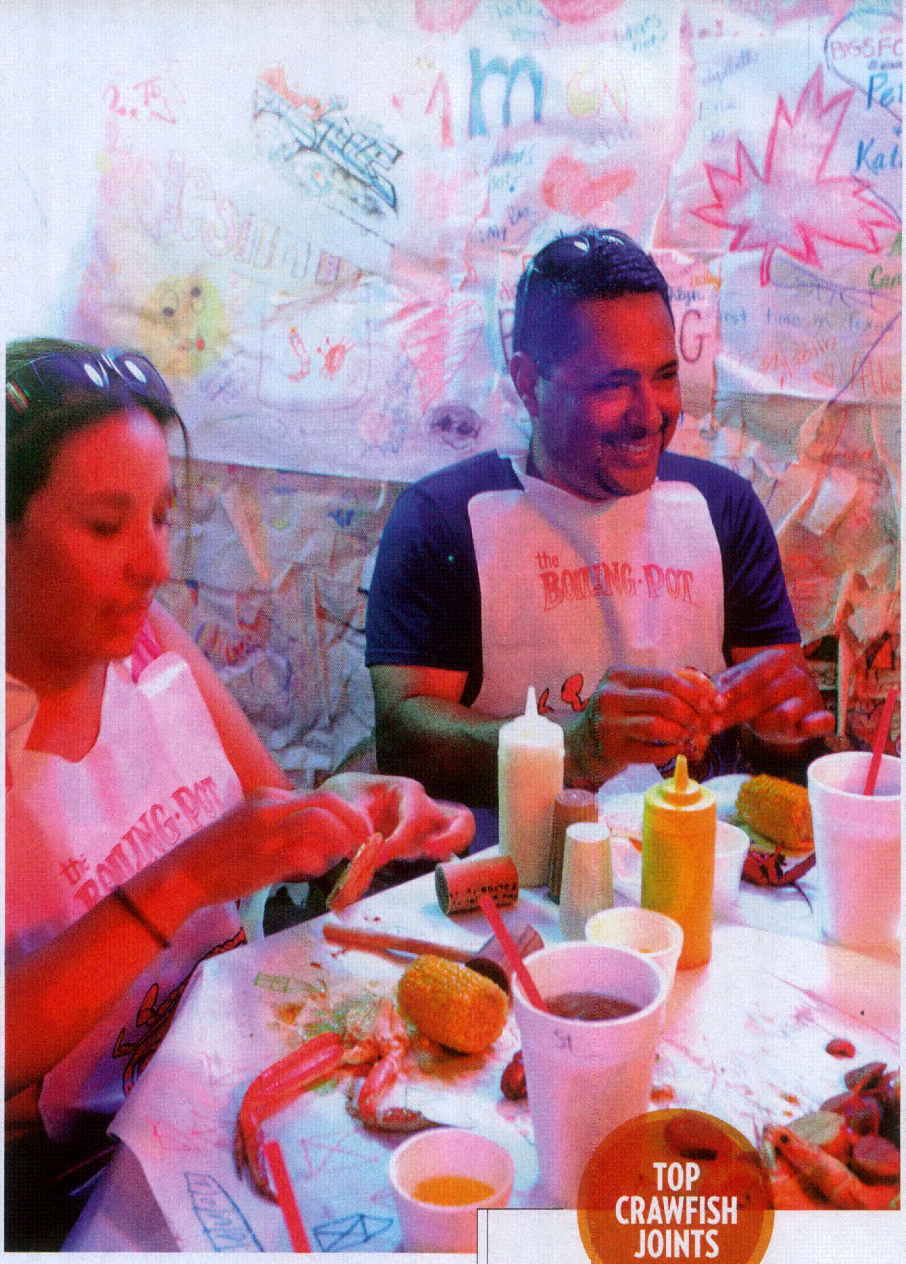
The tiny red shack with the corrugated metal roof is known for large crawfish. Juju, whose real name is Lacy Hanks Carter, grew up in Beaumont, and her grandmother gave her the catchy nickname. She got her seafood-boil seasoning recipe from her father, who boiled crawfish for large crowds when Juju was a kid. Call 409/794-2020.

RAGIN' CAJUN SOUTH LOUISIANA KITCHEN, HOUSTON

Driving west on Richmond Avenue in Houston, look for the giant red crawfish hanging over the door of the original location. The menu includes all kinds of Cajun food including gumbo, étouffée,

TEXANS EAT AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF CRAWFISH TODAY. BUT WHEN THE FIRST MUDBUGS DEBUTED IN TEXAS, THEY WEREN'T ALL THAT POPULAR.





Smart diners don bibs at the Boiling Pot in Rockport/Fulton, which serves all manner of seafood just steps from the docks.

crawfish year round are serving frozen crawfish, which tend to get mushy when defrosted.)

The Judice family and the success of Larry's French Market inspired other Cajun restaurants around the state. Ragin' Cajun South Louisiana Kitchen, a Houston chain with four locations, opened in the 1970s. Its original location on Richmond boasts a giant metal crawfish sculpture on the sign that towers over the entrance. The interior is decorated in LSU memorabilia—except during Mardi Gras, when it gets so covered in beads and bangles it looks like a runaway float from the Rex Krewe's parade. At the Crazy Cajun in Port Aransas, servers dump your crawfish, boiled shrimp, and snow crab legs on tables covered with paper. Both restaurants are favorite destinations for crawfish lovers.

The demand for crawfish exploded around 15 years ago, Jim Gossen told me. "People in this part of Texas used to sit around for hours eating boiled or barbecued crabs and drinking beer." But Texas blue crabs got scarce when seafood brokers started buying up the big ones to sell to Maryland crab houses. "My theory is that the crawfish replaced the crabs," Gossen said.

That explains the popularity of crawfish in restaurants known for seafood. When crabs got expensive, seaside crab shacks like the Boiling Pot in the fishing village of Fulton, just outside of Rockport, added crawfish to the mix. To get to the Boiling Pot, you walk right by the docks where the local shrimp and oyster fleets

TOP CRAWFISH JOINTS

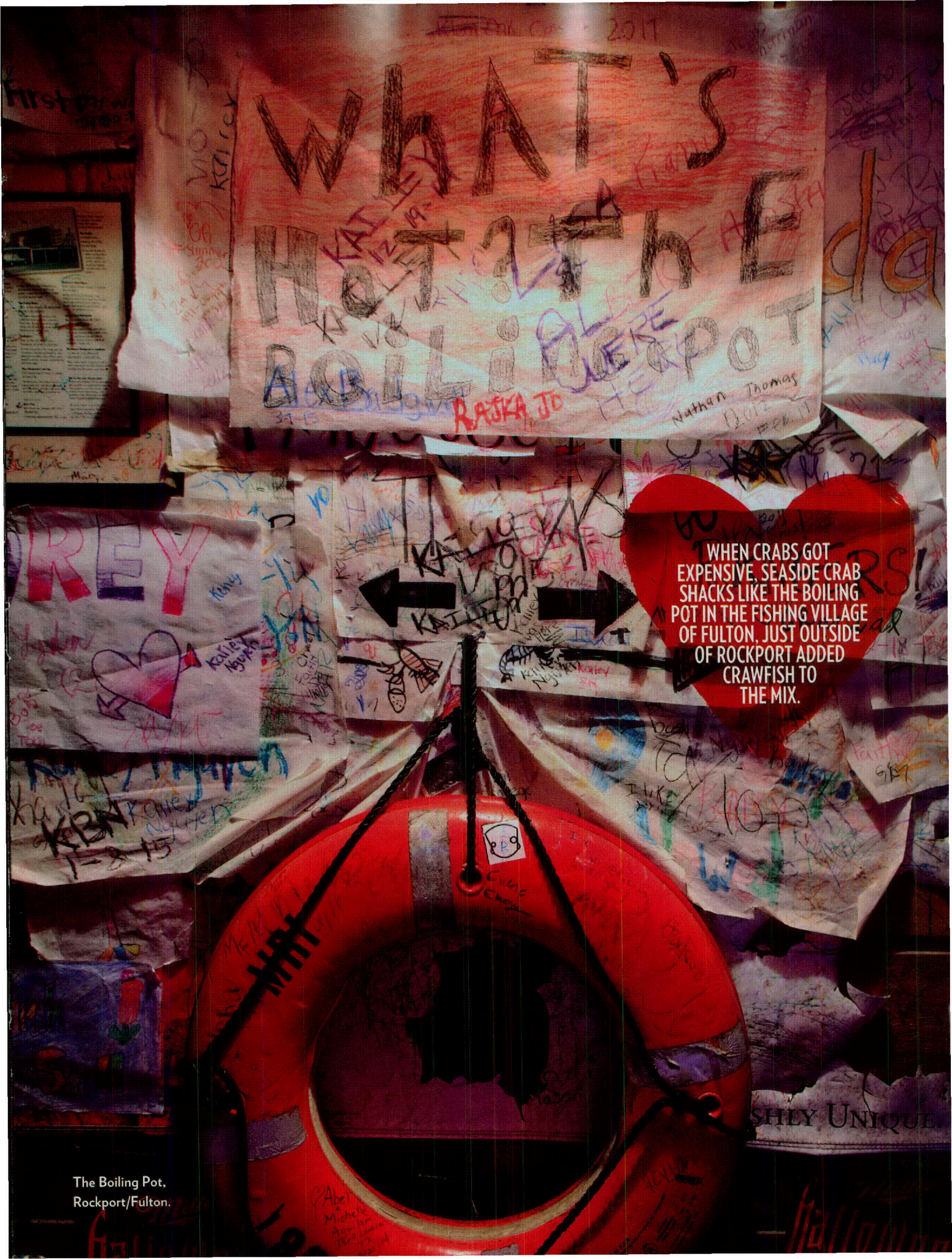
and barbecued crabs and crawfish (in season). Multiple Houston locations. See www.ragin-cajun.com.

THE BOILING POT, ROCKPORT/FULTON

Calling the atmosphere of a Texas crab shack like this one "casual" is an understatement. Your server dumps your dinner out of a pot onto your paper-covered table. You sort through the crawfish, crabs, shrimp, sausage, plus the corn-on-the-cob and red potatoes and eat them as soon as they are cool enough to handle. Call 361/729-6972.

ART'S FISH HOUSE, PORT LAVACA

Port Lavaca is located on an arm of Matagorda Bay, a sparsely populated



The Boiling Pot, Rockport/Fulton.

At Houston's Cajun Kitchen, which offers a full menu of seafood, pasta, and po' boys, crawfish fans like Saysana Loft and Stephan Arriela make short work out of a pile of mudbugs.

tie up. The exterior is done in graffiti-covered metal sheets and the interior décor boasts graffiti-covered surf boards and neon beer signs.

The waiter covers your table with paper, and if you're smart, you cover your shirt with a bib before she dumps a huge mess of boiled goodness in front of you. You'll find crabs, shrimp, sausage slices, corn-on-the-cob, and potatoes in the mix—and lots of crawfish, too—though crawfish don't come from the fishing boats tied up outside the restaurant.

Gulf Coast Vietnamese-Americans are wild about Cajun-style boiled crawfish, too—and the spicier, the better. The Vietnamese came to the Gulf Coast after the fall of Saigon in

TOP CRAWFISH JOINTS

fisherman's paradise 120 miles southwest of Houston. Every fishing center needs a great seafood restaurant, and Art's Fish House fills the bill. Cajun boils with crawfish, crab, and shrimp are the specialty of the house. But there's also gumbo, étouffée, and fried seafood on the menu, including shrimp, redfish, and flounder. There's chicken-fried steak, too. Call 361/482-0417.

PINCHERS, EL CAMPO

Pinchers is a "pond-to-table" mudbug joint and a full-service restaurant. There's also a gas station and RV Park. You'll find crawfish here January to August only. Call 979/543-2645.

REPKA'S GROCERY, BROOKSHIRE

Repka's is a sprawling country store with a bar and lots of worn wooden booths and tables. During crawfish season, the action

centers on the back patio, where most nights cooks prepare thousands of pounds of mudbugs in giant boiling pots. Legend has it that the Repkas started out giving free crawfish to customers; now the grocery store is all but empty and the crawfish have taken over. Call 281/934-4499.

LA CRAWFISH, WEBSTER, HOUSTON, SAN ANTONIO, AND AUSTIN

Order at the counter and sit at picnic tables covered with plastic tablecloths, and don't miss the self-serve condiment station where you can make your own dipping sauces. The spice levels are mild, medium, or spicy, and the flavorings including garlic butter, Cajun, and chile lime. See www.thelacrawfish.com.

CAJUN KITCHEN, HOUSTON

These may be the most intensely spiced crawfish in Texas. Get your crawfish (and crab, shrimp, and sausage) in the amazing "Kitchen Special" boil. The cooking liquid contains lemongrass, onion, green onion, lemon and lime slices, tamarind, and sugar. A coating of butter, garlic, and spices is added to the boiled crawfish in a hot wok. See www.cajunkitchenhouston.com.

HONG KONG CITY MALL FOOD COURT, HOUSTON

Crawfish & Beignets is the most popular place to buy boiled crawfish in the Hong Kong City Mall Food Court. Family-style Vietnamese crawfish feasts take place here on weekends, especially in the spring. Mountains of crawfish are piled on long tables in the huge food court and a dozen people pull up chairs for a crawfish-eating marathon complete with lots of beverages and conversation. At 11201 Bellaire Blvd.

OTHERS IN THE STORY INCLUDE:

Crazy Cajun, Port Aransas. Call 361/749-5069.
Hank's Cajun Crawfish, Houston. Call 281/988-8974.
Crawfish & Noodles, Houston. Call 281/988-8098.

the 1970s, and they started shrimping and processing seafood, industries they had pursued back home. There are a lot of similarities between Vietnamese and Cajun cuisine—both are based on rice and seafood, tend to be highly seasoned, and come from French colonial origins. In time, Cajuns started eating Vietnamese po'boy sandwiches, and the Vietnamese adopted Cajun traditions like spicy boiled crawfish.

In 2002, I visited a Cajun crawfish joint on the west side of Houston, and the owner told me that when she moved to Houston from Louisiana, she noticed that there was no place to eat boiled crawfish in the huge Vietnamese neighborhood around Bellaire Boulevard and Beltway 8. And since the area was already crowded with excellent Asian restaurants, she opened a Cajun restaurant specializing in crawfish instead. Thus began the tradition of Vietnamese-owned crawfish restaurants with Cajun names.

The spicy dipping sauces make Vietnamese crawfish unusual. In the beginning, Vietnamese customers used lime wedges, salt, and pepper to make a traditional Vietnamese dipping sauce. Others mixed Louisiana hot sauce, ground cayenne, and other ingredients to make a fiery cocktail sauce.

Then came the shaker bags. Savvy crawfish eaters started donning lobster bibs and plastic gloves to protect themselves when chef Tony Bu at Hank's Cajun Crawfish on Bellaire started putting the crawfish in clear plastic bags and tossing them with melted margarine, dehydrated garlic, cayenne, and other flavorings. The crawfish were served swimming in sauce.

Trong Nguyen, owner of Houston's Crawfish & Noodles, later elevated this garlicky, peppery crawfish dressing with expensive French butter and fresh garlic. The restaurant also serves the Vietnamese soup called *pho* as well as other noodle dishes.

But Cajun Kitchen on Wilcrest took Vietnamese-style crawfish to another level, adding lemongrass, ginger, and other Thai seasonings to the boiling liquid and offering more options—you can add the usual shrimp and crabs, and corn and potatoes, of course; but you can also get king crab legs, snow crab legs, clams, turkey necks, and sausage thrown into the pot. Other Cajun Kitchen menu sections include po' boy sandwiches (including one filled with crawfish tails) and spicy chicken wings.

The Vietnamese crawfish craze has spread across South Texas in the last few years. LA Crawfish (for Louisiana, not Los Angeles) draws diners of all ilk to its central-city and suburban Houston locations; an Austin location opened at the end of last summer.

Whether you order them at a Cajun joint or one of the new Vietnamese/Cajun places, you need to go try some mudbugs this season. You can't go wrong either way. At Larry's French Market & Cajun Restaurant in Groves, I was surprised when the waitress asked if I wanted some butter dip on the side with my crawfish. It seems that Vietnamese-style crawfish has become so popular that even the cradle of Texas crawfish is offering dipping sauces to keep up with the times. ★

James Beard Award-winning author and restaurateur Robb Walsh likes his mudbugs spicy. Photographer Eric W. Pohl specializes in architecture, food, and travel-related topics.

BIG BEND BLUEBONNETS AND THE CHISOS MOUNTAINS, BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

The Magnificent Seven

Corralling classic wildflowers from seven regions across Texas

Text by Melissa Gaskill

PHOTO: © Sean Fitzgerald

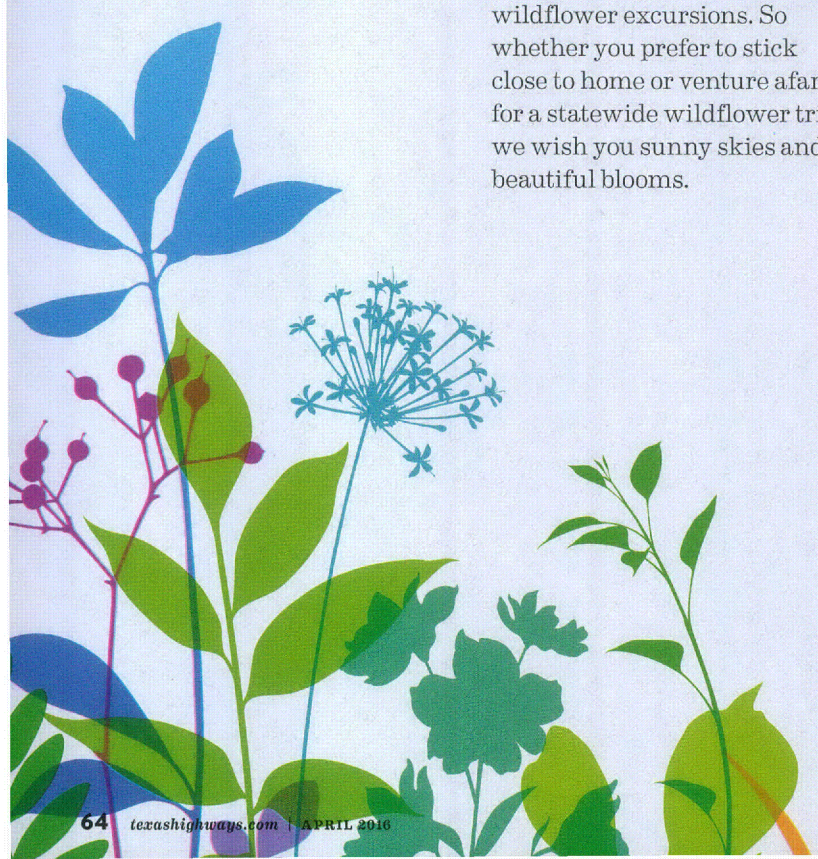
Texas is blessed

with an abundance and variety of wildflowers. Come springtime, nearly every corner of the state boasts photogenic displays of beautiful blooms.

Some wildflowers grow all over the state, while others appear in a more limited fashion, perhaps only blooming in dry, desert areas or in moist areas along rivers and creeks. The state's various landscapes, from the Piney Woods to the Trans-Pecos, inhabit distinctive soil conditions and climates, which influence the local plants. For example, the Blackland Prairie—a strip of deep, fertile soil that runs up and down east-central Texas—is a favorite for such wildflowers as Indian paintbrush, firewheel, and primrose.

Many of us claim an attachment to at least one wildflower—one with a beauty or fragrance that triggers associations of memorable places, faces, and happenings. Such favorites are personal—tailored by the intricacies of our individual experiences and as diverse as the splashes of color across a Washington County pasture at the height of spring.

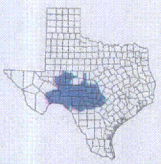
Still, some wildflowers loom particularly large in certain parts of the state, and with the help of our expert friends at the University of Texas at Austin's Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, we've selected symbolic wildflowers for seven regions across Texas. We've also included recommendations for fun activities and attractions to complement your springtime wildflower excursions. So whether you prefer to stick close to home or venture afar for a statewide wildflower trip, we wish you sunny skies and beautiful blooms.



EDWARDS PLATEAU

PRAIRIE VERBENA

(Glandularia bipinnatifida)



PRAIRIE VERBENA (inset) prefer a bit of shade and well-drained sand, loam, clay, caliche, and limestone soils. While it blooms throughout much of the state, the flower finds ideal conditions in the area around Utopia. Its rounded clusters of blooms are bilaterally symmetrical, meaning the two sides of each flower are mirror images. The flowers can sport pink, lavender, or purple hues; prairie verbena's Spanish name, *moradilla*, means "little purple one." With blooms in spring, summer, and fall, prairie verbena decorate pastures and the sides of the many winding roads in the Utopia area. Around here, you'll also find Indian blankets, bluebonnets, daisies, and others.

Stay: The Treetop Lodge, just east of Leakey, sleeps 16 people and includes a covered deck high in a cypress tree above the Frio River. Additional decks overlook the river, and a patio provides access to the water and a rope swing. *Call 830/966-2320; www.friolodging.com/vacation_homes/frio_river_treetop.html.*

Eat: The unassuming but locally famous Mac and Ernie's Roadside Eatery in Tarpley serves entrées like fried catfish and lamb chops, as well as such playful riffs on the good ol' hamburger as a cabrito burger and an antelope burger. *Call 830/562-3727; www.macandernies.com.*

Play: Take Hill Country Adventures' two- to four-hour guided Champion Big Trees Tour to see some of the largest and oldest trees in Texas, including several state and national champion trees. Trees on the tour include Texas persimmon, evergreen sumac, honey mesquite, and a 96-foot-tall bald cypress. *Call 830/966-2320; www.hillcountryadventures.com.*

PHOTO: © Steven Schwartzman (inset)

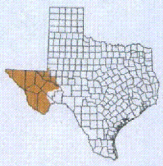
PHLOX ACCENT A SPRING MIX OF FLORA, LLANO COUNTY

PHOTO: © Joe Lowery

TRANS-PECOS MOUNTAINS

BIG BEND BLUEBONNET

(Lupinus havardii)



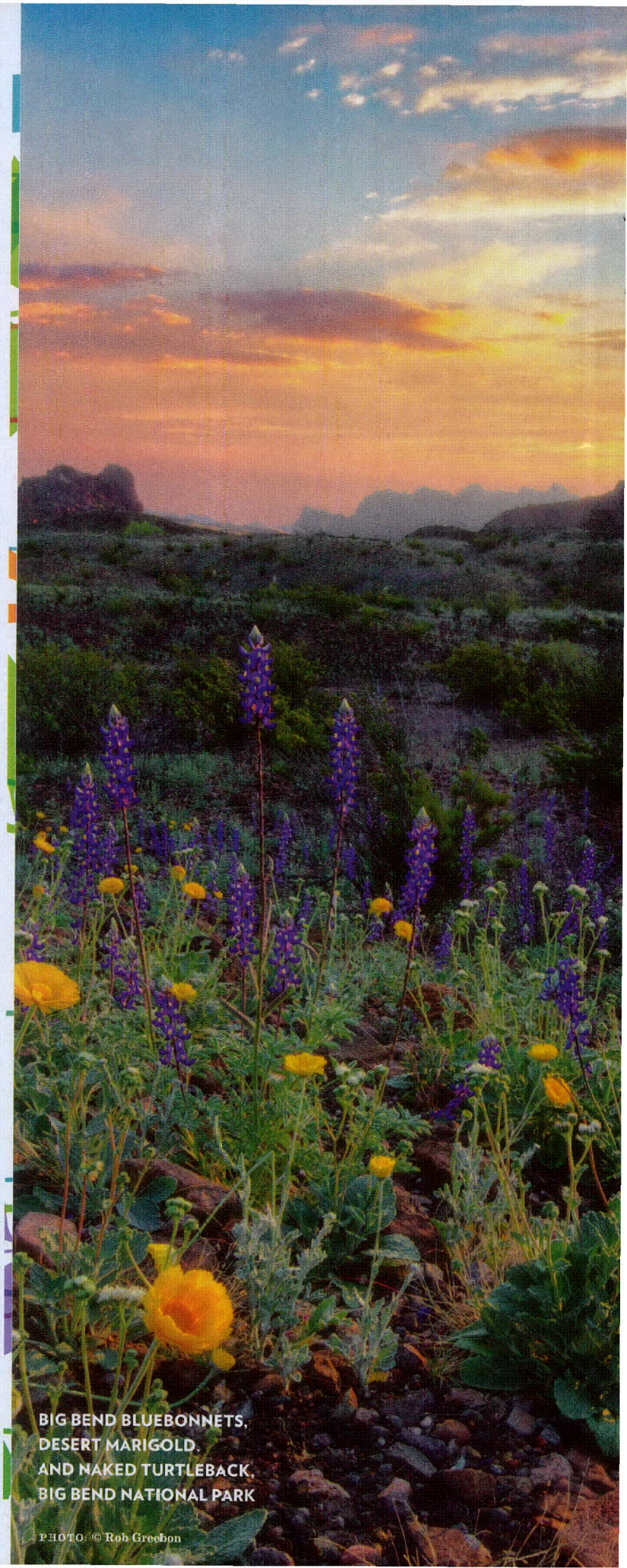
THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE first designated the *Lupinus subcarnosus* variety of bluebonnet as the official state flower in 1901. These grow about six to 16 inches tall and sport bright-blue, pea-shaped petals. In 1971, however, the Legislature extended the official flower designation to all six *Lupinus* species, including the Big Bend bluebonnet. This species grows three to four feet tall with flowers on the upper four to eight inches of the stem. True to its name, it prefers the Trans-Pecos region's dry alluvium or fine talus soils, and it requires plenty of sun. Alluvium is loose sediment deposited by running water and is often found in river or creek beds.

Spot these impressive bluebonnets along the roadsides and on hiking trails that cross or follow creek beds. Try the gravelly creek on Cinco Tinajas Trail in Big Bend Ranch State Park or Santa Elena Canyon Trail in Big Bend National Park. In this part of Texas, you can also see the blooms of yucca, mountain laurel, cactus, and huisache.

Stay: Perched on a hillside in the Terlingua ghost town, La Posada Milagro Guesthouse has four cozy rooms created from stacked rock ruins. A large patio features an outdoor kitchen, fire pit, and stunning views of the mountains of Big Bend and Mexico. Espresso y Poco Mas, the on-site coffee shop, serves made-from-scratch breakfasts and lunches. *Call 432/371-3044; www.laposadamilagro.net.*

Play: For a different perspective of the dramatic Big Bend landscape, try a boat. Local outfitters offer half-day or longer Rio Grande float trips through the rugged mountains, where guides point out geologic formations and desert plants and animals. Many also offer guided hiking, mountain biking, and jeep tours. *www.visitbigbend.com/river-trips.*

Eat: Terlingua's Starlight Theatre, originally built as a movie house for Chisos Mining Company employees, became an eclectic restaurant and bar in 1991. After a day of taking in wildflowers and the desert mountains, refuel with a wild axis burger, topped with roasted green chiles and Swiss cheese, and a prickly pear margarita, made with tequila and prickly pear nectar. *Call 432/371-3400; www.thestarlighttheatre.com.*

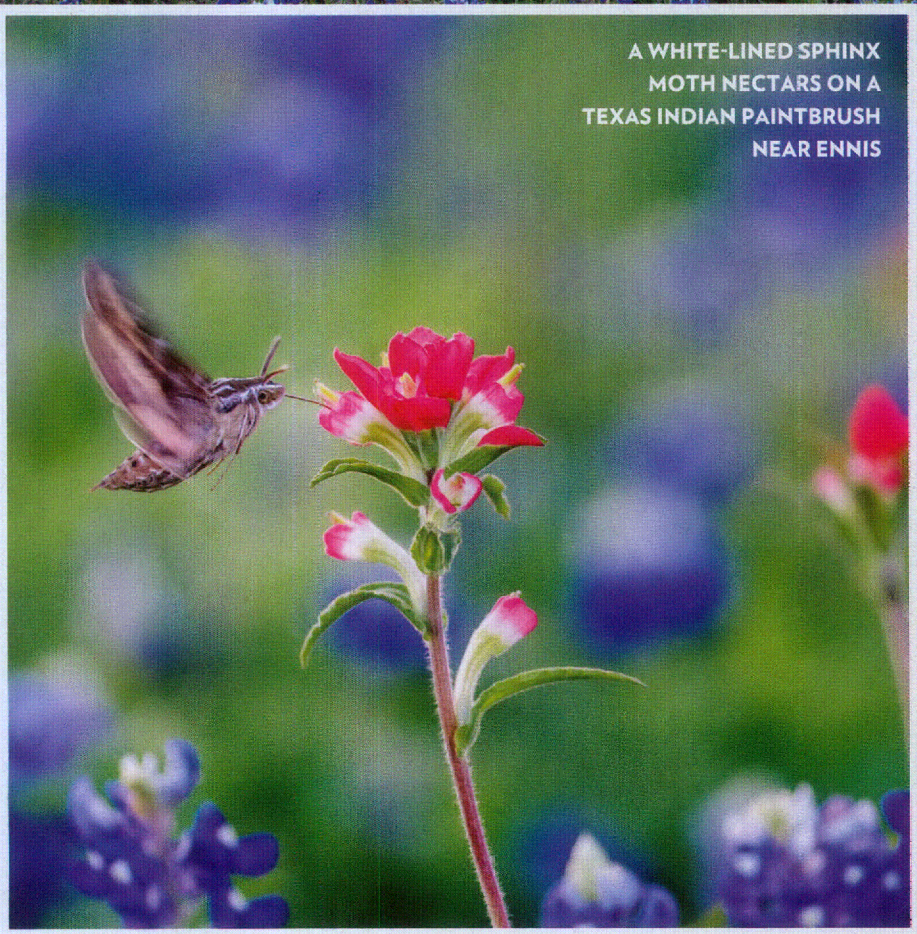


BIG BEND BLUEBONNETS, DESERT MARIGOLD, AND NAKED TURTLEBACK, BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

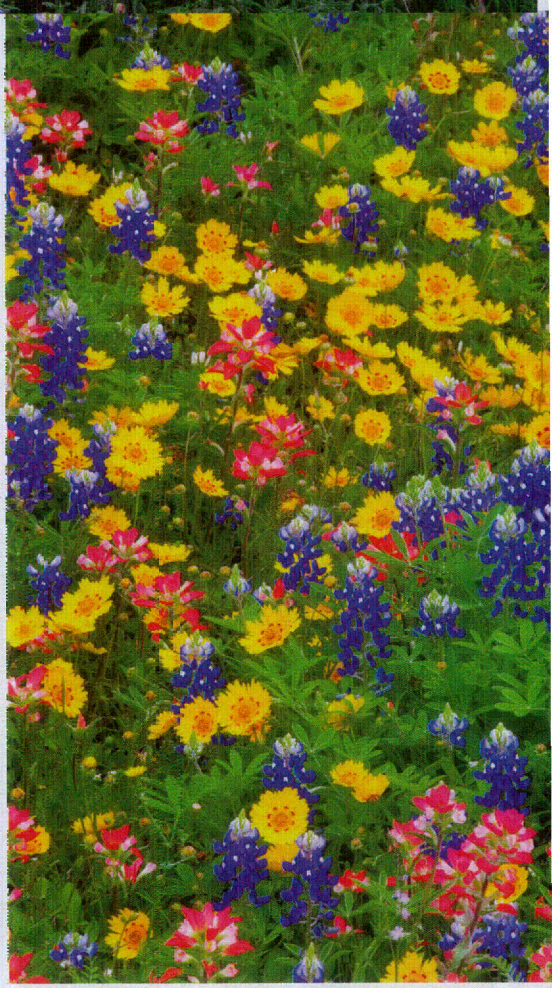
PHOTO: © Rob Greebon

PHOTOS: (Clockwise from top left) © Rob Greebon; © Laura Vu; © Laurence Parent; © Sean Fitzgerald

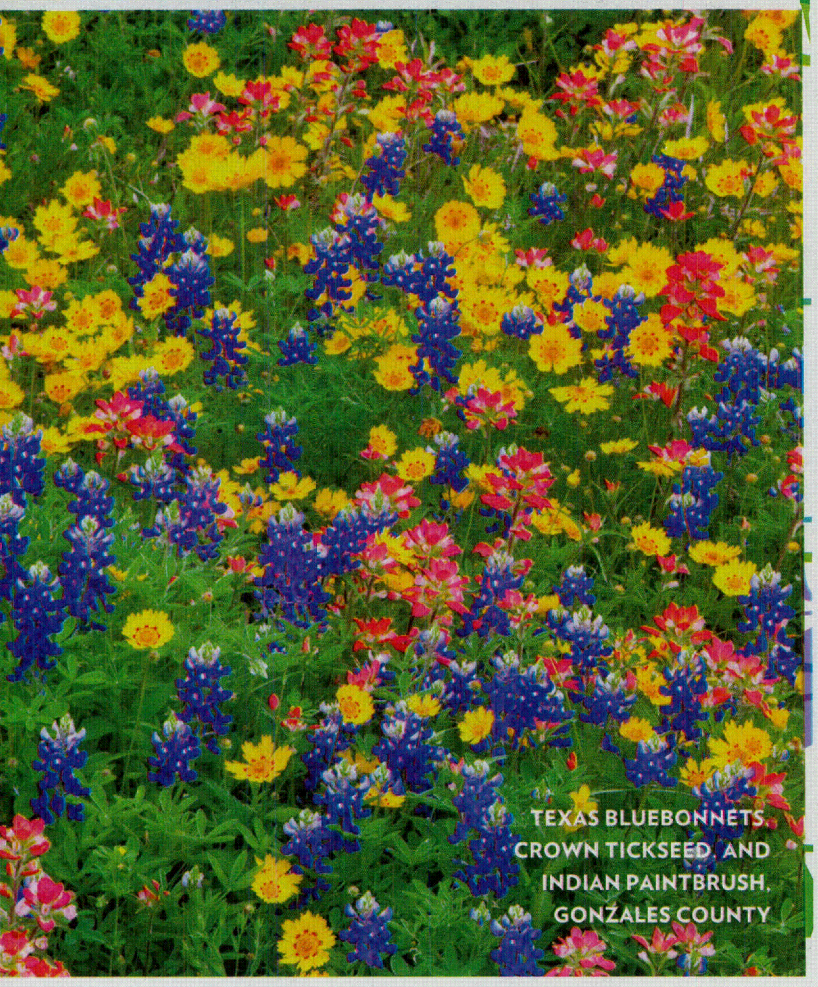
TEXAS BLUEBONNETS AND WINECUPS, MASON COUNTY



A WHITE-LINED SPHINX MOTH NECTARS ON A TEXAS INDIAN PAINTBRUSH NEAR ENNIS



SANDYLAND BLUEBONNETS AND DRUMMOND'S PHLOX, ATASCOSA COUNTY

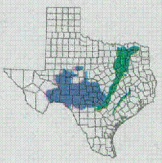


TEXAS BLUEBONNETS, CROWN TICKSEED, AND INDIAN PAINTBRUSH, GONZALES COUNTY

BLACKLAND PRAIRIE/EDWARDS PLATEAU

TEXAS BLUEBONNET

(Lupinus texensis)



THE FAMILIAR TEXAS BLUEBONNET has larger, more sharply pointed leaves than its cousins, and more flower heads, too—clusters of up to 50 fragrant petals with a white tip. One of six species dubbed the state flower of Texas, this bluebonnet blooms from Louisiana to West Texas and down to San Luis Potosí in northern Mexico. In Texas, it occurs most abundantly in the Blackland Prairie and Edwards Plateau, thriving in sunny prairies and open fields with dry limestone, sandy or clay loam, and calcareous or caliche soil.

The Brenham area is a favorite of bluebonnet aficionados for its pastoral landscape of rolling hills and prairies, adorned by rustic barns, cattle herds, and fields of wildflowers. April 9-10, the Bluebonnet Festival in Chappell Hill, located about 10 miles west of Brenham, celebrates the state flower and provides a worthy reason to explore the area. Farther west in the Hill Country, the Highland Lakes town of Burnet claims the title of "Bluebonnet Capital of Texas" and hosts its own Bluebonnet Festival on April 8-10. Both events practically guarantee swaths of the flowers, along with Indian paintbrush, Texas yellow star, and Engelmann's daisies.

Stay: Down a quiet side street off Chappell Hill's main drive, Southern Rose Ranch Bed and Breakfast offers two guest suites and a spacious outdoor kitchen surrounded by stone walls with a fireplace and hot tub. Enjoy a gourmet breakfast made with the ranch's fresh eggs and herbs. *Call 979/251-7871; www.southernroseranch.com.*

Eat: Step back into the 1950s at the Southern Flyer Diner, located at the Brenham Municipal Airport, complete with a jukebox, waitresses in poodle skirts, and a view of airplanes coming and going. This lunch spot is known for treats like malts, old-fashioned root beer floats, and milkshakes. Rumor has it that pilots will fly through bad weather for the milkshakes. *Call 979/836-5462; www.brenhammunicipalairport.com.*

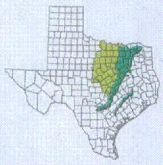
Play: Saddle up at Texas Ranch Life, an 1,800-acre working ranch and resort, for a two-hour horseback ride (by reservation) through rolling hills, pecan bottoms, and fields awash in bluebonnets, winecups, aster, and more. *Call 979/865-3649; www.texasranchlife.com.*

CORN POPPIES (NON-NATIVE), CASTROVILLE

PHOTO: © Theresa DiMenno

SPOTTED BEEBALM

(Monarda punctata)



THIS PERENNIAL GROWS as tall as three feet and sports whorls of yellowish, purple-spotted, tubular flowers that form a dense, elongated spike. Its fragrant leaves smell like oregano and are known to ease backache, fever, and inflammation when crushed and steeped in cold water. Drought-tolerant beebalm (inset) likes sandy, well-drained soil and grows on prairies, plains, meadows, and savannahs across the eastern half of the country.

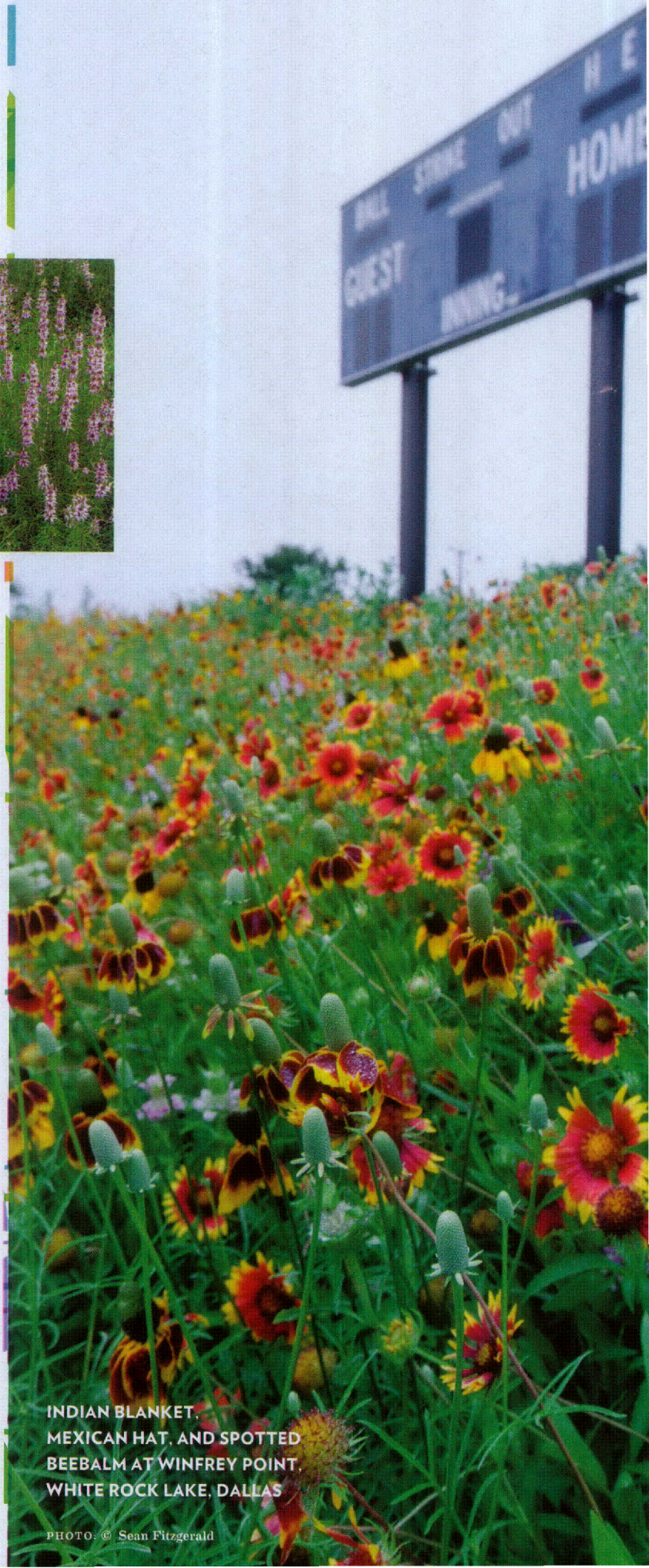
The Trinity Forks Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas reports that beebalm can be found throughout the LBJ Grasslands, which straddles US 287 north of Decatur. Look for the flowers from roads and trails through any open, sunny area.

In the Johnson Branch of Ray Roberts Lake State Park, beebalm blooms along many of the roadsides, along trails in the Walnut and Juniper camping loops, and on the Vanishing Prairie Trail, says Ranger Danielle Bradley. Open areas in the state park are also home to bluebonnets, gayfeather, Indian paintbrush, black-eyed Susan, antelope horns, meadow pink, and others.

Stay: Two wings of rooms at Lantana Resort in Ray Roberts Lake State Park overlook cedar, post oak, and black oak trees on the shores of the lake. A popular destination for events, the resort also provides its visitors with free entry to the state park. *Call 940/686-0261, www.lantanaresortmarina.com.*

Play: This part of North Texas boasts one of the greatest concentrations of horse farms in the United States—more than 300. See them on self-guided driving tours or join one of Denton's "Behind-the-Scenes Horse Country Tours" by bus on April 2 or May 7, and in the fall on October 1, November 5, and December 3. *Call 940/382-7895; www.discoverdenton.com/what-to-do/horse-country.*

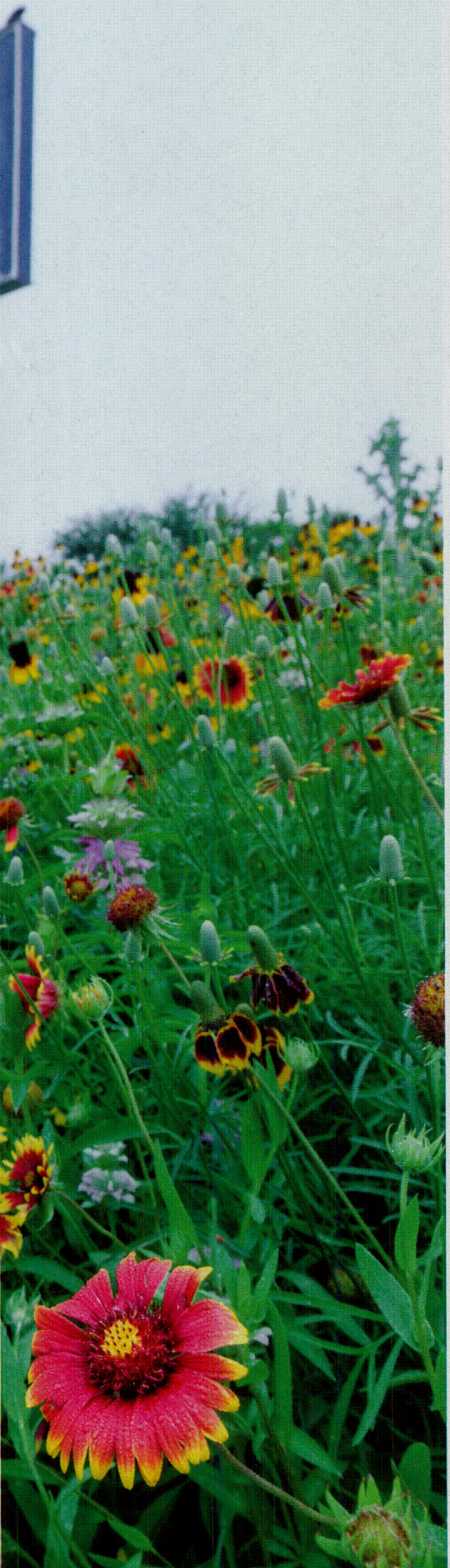
Eat: In Denton, head for the Austin Street Truck Stop for a wide selection of food-truck choices, including the Waffle Wagon, Vietnamese cuisine at the Pickled Carrot, sandwiches at Hoagieslinger, Korean fusion by Say Kimchi, tacos at Flatlanders Taco Company, and barbecue at Coochie's BBQ and Tha Smokin Chef. Check the website for the trucks' schedules. *Call 940/218-1401; www.austinstruckstop.com.*



INDIAN BLANKET, MEXICAN HAT, AND SPOTTED BEEBALM AT WINFREY POINT, WHITE ROCK LAKE, DALLAS

PHOTO: © Sean Fitzgerald

PHOTO: © Steven Schwartzman (inset)



PINEY WOODS

FLOWERING DOGWOOD

(Cornus florida)

FLOWERING DOGWOOD TREES reach heights of 20 feet, with a spreading crown and showy white and pink blooms. In addition to spring flowers, dogwoods sport red summer fruit and bright scarlet autumn foliage.

Dogwoods grow in thickets, stream banks, and dry uplands along the entire East Coast, westward to the Mississippi River and in Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and East Texas. The city of Palestine celebrates its abundant dogwoods with the annual Dogwood Trails Celebration in late March and early April. Another good place to see the beautiful white blooms is around Huntsville. Drive Park Road 40 in Huntsville State Park or walk its 1.78-mile Dogwood Trail. The park has 21 miles of trails, including a trailhead to access the 128-mile Lone Star Trail. Look for American beautyberry and Turk's cap here, too.

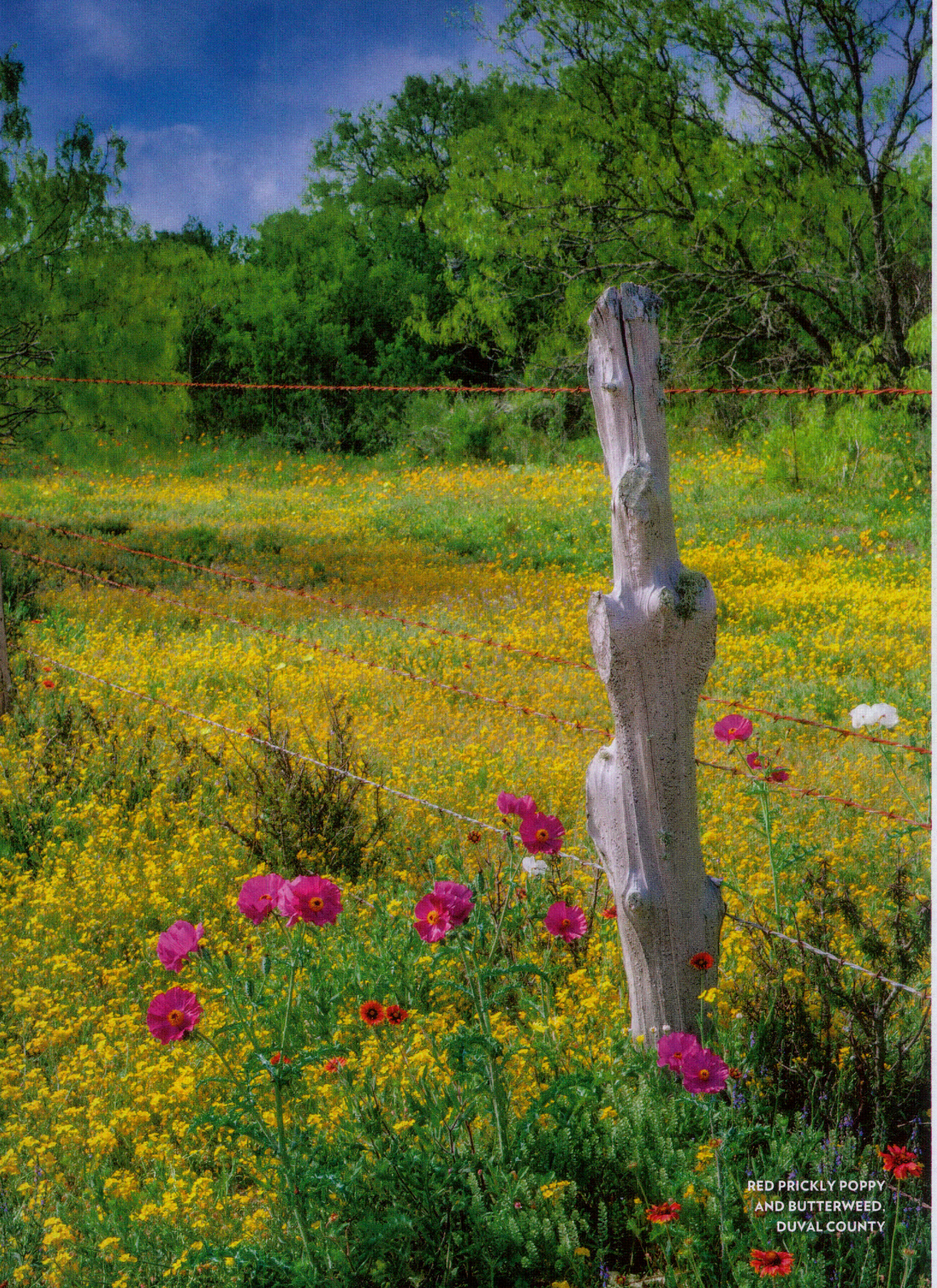
Stay: The cabins at rustic Bethy Creek Resort come equipped with a kitchen and provide scenic views of tree-lined Lake Livingston. Book a cabin or a campsite for easy access to the resort's plethora of lake activities—a sandy beach, fishing pier, boat slips, and boat rentals. Bethy Creek is about 11 miles from Huntsville, and you're likely to see dogwoods on the drive out. *Call 800/537-6251; www.bethycreek.com.*

Play: The 128-mile Lone Star Hiking Trail through Sam Houston National Forest, from Lake Conroe to near Cleveland, takes in forest, swamps, and wildflowers. With multiple access points, the trail provides routes of a few hours up to a day or more. Over the years, students and Boy Scouts have planted wildflowers along the trail, including bluebonnets, Indian blankets, black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower, and others. *www.lonestartrail.org.*

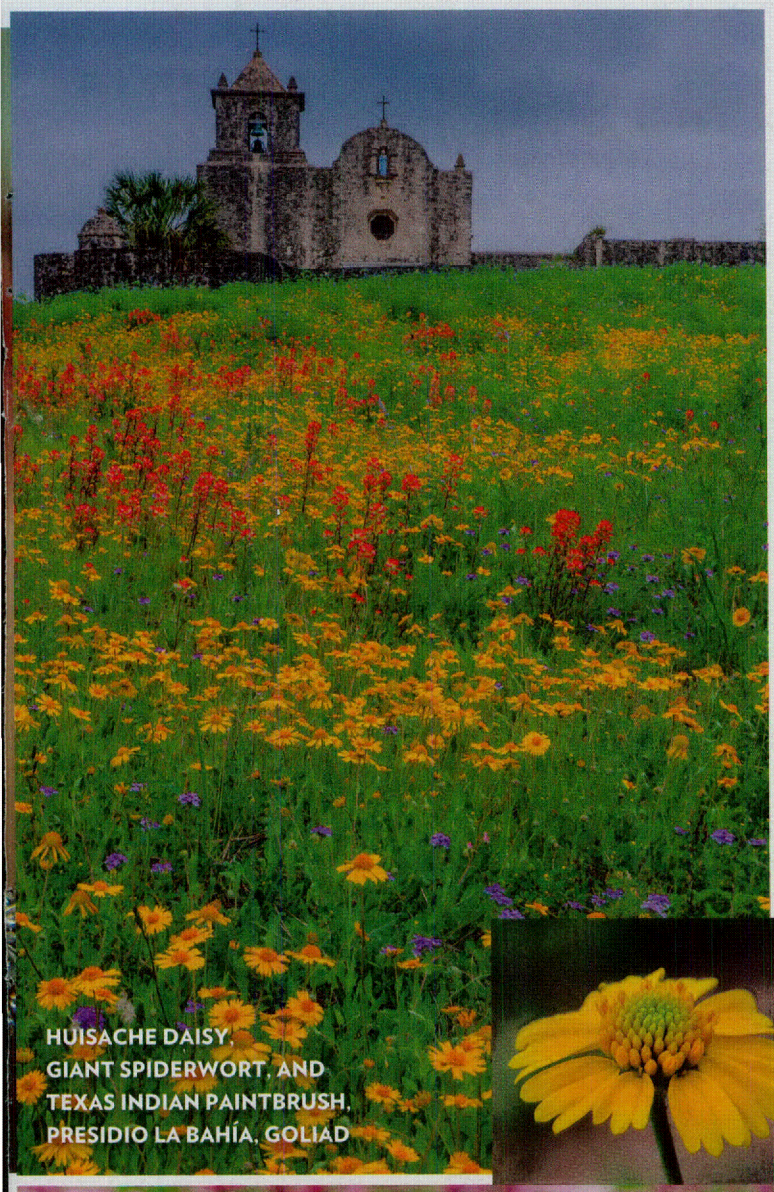
Eat: The menu at Farmhouse Cafe in Huntsville contains a wide selection of down-home favorites, but don't miss the fresh rolls or such daily blue-plate specials as meatloaf, chicken and dumplings, and pot roast. The Farmhouse also bakes pies and cakes, available by the slice or whole to take home. *Call 936/435-1450, www.farmhousecafe.net.*

FLOWERING DOGWOOD, ANGELINA COUNTY

PHOTO: © Joe Lowery



RED PRICKLY POPPY
AND BUTTERWEED,
DUVAL COUNTY



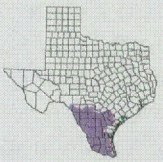
HUISACHE DAISY, GIANT SPIDERWORT, AND TEXAS INDIAN PAINTBRUSH, PRESIDIO LA BAHÍA, GOLIAD

RED PRICKLY POPPY, DUVAL COUNTY

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

HUISACHE DAISY

(Amblyolepis setigera)



THIS BRIGHT YELLOW DAISY (inset) often grows in thick stands under huisache trees and other chaparral bushes, hence its name. Growing six to 15 inches tall, the large, dome-shaped flowers can form a thick blanket of gold when blooming from March through June. Huisache daisies prefer well-drained sand, loam, and caliche soils, and therefore often bloom on dry, open hillsides across much of the western two-thirds of the state and northeastern Mexico.

Find huisache daisies at Goliad State Park and Historic Site, especially in the field near Cardinal's Haven Bird Blind and the Longhorn tent camping area, as well as along the road leading to the Jacales camping area. Look for more blooms alongside US 183, just after crossing the San Antonio River, in front of historic Presidio la Bahía. Phlox, coreopsis, and rose prickly poppies bloom here as well.

Stay: Built in 1749, Presidio la Bahía is a National Historic Landmark and one of the finest extant examples of a Spanish frontier fort. Spanish soldiers stationed here fought the British along the Gulf Coast during the American Revolution and, in the lead-up to the Texas Revolution, Texans captured the fort from Mexico in 1835. Spend the night immersed in history in The Quarters, a part of the presidio that once housed Mexican officers and Catholic priests. Sleeps four. *Call 361/645-3752; www.presidiolabahia.org/quarters.htm.*

Play: Experience the San Antonio River on the Goliad Paddling Trail, a 6.6-mile route from US 59 to a take-out in Goliad State Park. The narrow, winding stream passes through woodlands of cypress, oak, and pecan trees that support a variety of birdlife including herons, kingfishers, hawks, phoebes, and turkeys. *www.tpwd.texas.gov/fishboat/boat/paddlingtrails/inland/goliad.*

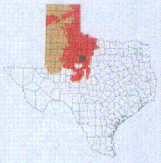
Eat: The Hanging Tree Restaurant looks out on Goliad's courthouse square and a magnificent oak tree, from which several oxcart operators were hanged in 1857 for murdering rival freight haulers in a conflict known as the Cart Wars. Dine from a menu of hearty comfort food like chicken-fried steak, fried chicken, and hamburgers amid rustic décor such as hunting trophies. Open for lunch and dinner. *Call 361/645-8955.*

PHOTOS: © Joe Lowery; © Steven Schwartzman (inset)

HIGH PLAINS/ROLLING PLAINS

TAHOKA DAISY

(Machaeranthera tanacetifolia)



ALSO KNOWN AS TANSYASTER, this flower (inset) has showy lavender petals around a yellow center topping stems with fern-like leaves. The six- to 12-inch plants grow in well-drained, sandy, or rocky soils from Canada to Mexico, including across the High Plains and Trans-Pecos, and east to streambeds of the Edwards Plateau.

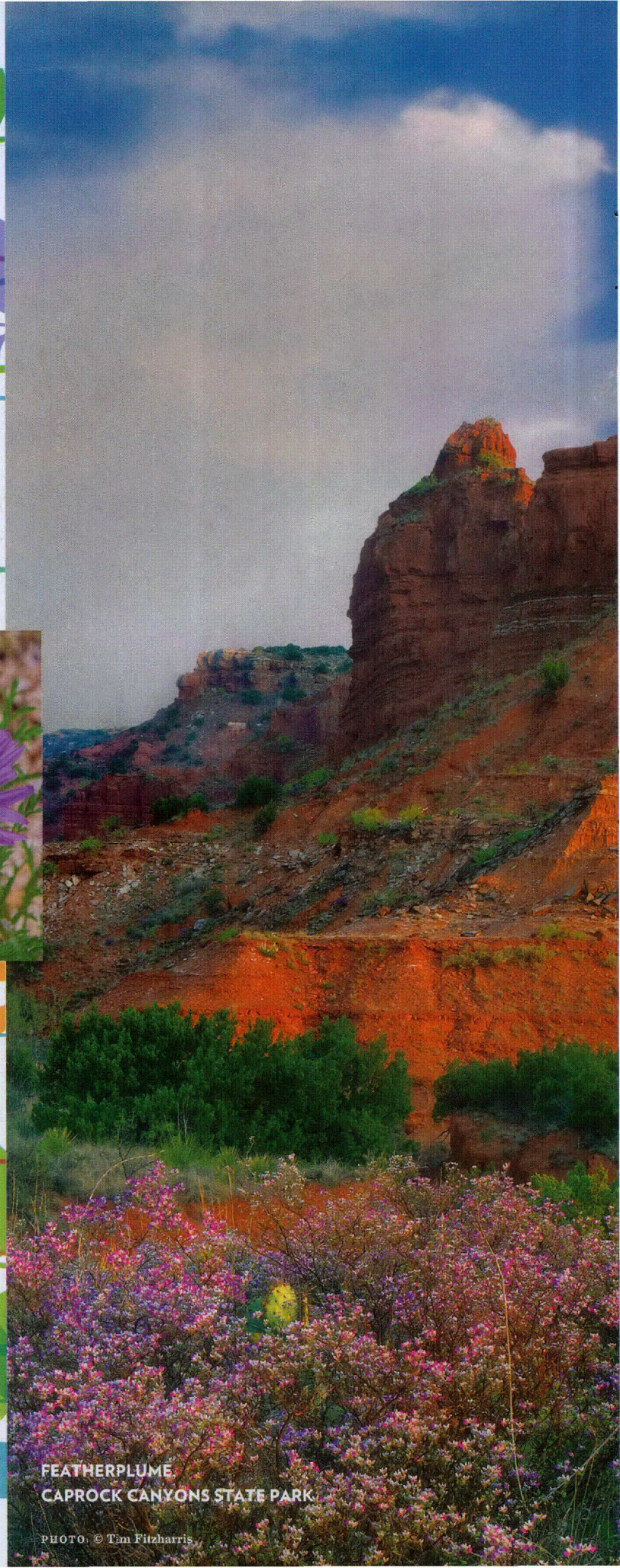
Tahoka daisies brighten the floor of Palo Duro Canyon, along with Indian blanket, American basket-flower, sunflower, paper-flower, blackfoot daisy, sand sage, yucca, and prickly pear. The trails of Palo Duro Canyon State Park offer prime opportunities to look for blooms. Try the milelong Paseo del Rio trail, which follows a fork of the Red River, or the Pioneer Nature Trail, a half-mile loop.

Stay: In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps built three rock cabins on the rim of Palo Duro Canyon. Each features unlimited scenic views of the dramatic landscape below and sleeps four. *Call 806/488-2227; www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/palo-duro-canyon.*

Play: In Canyon, the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum covers this region's very busy past 14,000 years. Experience the life-size *Pioneer Town,* one of the Southwest's finest art collections, and exhibits on paleontology, geology, archeology, textiles, windmills, and transportation. *Call 806/651-2244; www.panhandleplains.org.*

Eat: Palace Coffee Company, located in the historic Smith Building on Canyon's town square, serves up coffee and espresso drinks made from custom-roasted beans. Try the Cause Latte; for each one sold, the shop gives $1 to a community nonprofit. *Call 806/476-0111, ext. 2; www.palacecoffee.co/canyon.* ★

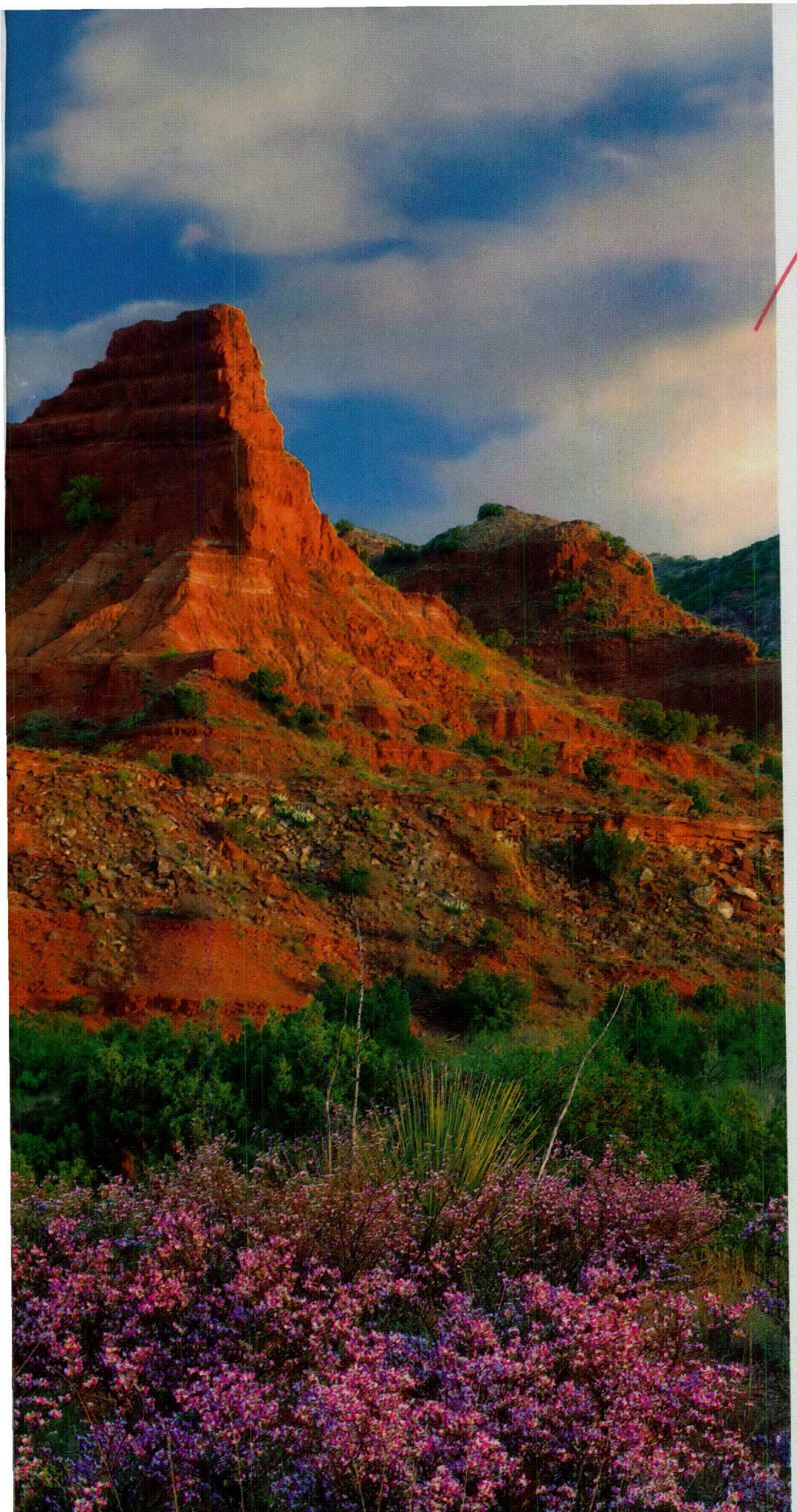
A lifelong fan of wildflowers, writer Melissa Gaskill fondly recalls seeing her first Big Bend bluebonnet a few years ago: "It stood tall in a creek bed, a brilliant blue spot against the desert background at Big Bend Ranch State Park."



FEATHERPLUME, CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK

PHOTO: © Tim Fitzharris

PHOTO: © Steven Schwartzman (inset)



Wildflowers, Abridged

Among the qualities of Texas that we treasure most are its vastness and natural diversity—and the beautiful variety of wildflowers that flourish in the state's far-flung regions. But it can be difficult to embark on the type of road trip required to see each of the state's distinct environments in person. Don't be discouraged! *Texas Highways* is once again compiling stunning images of these scattered beauties for our annual wildflower photo exhibit at the **Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.**

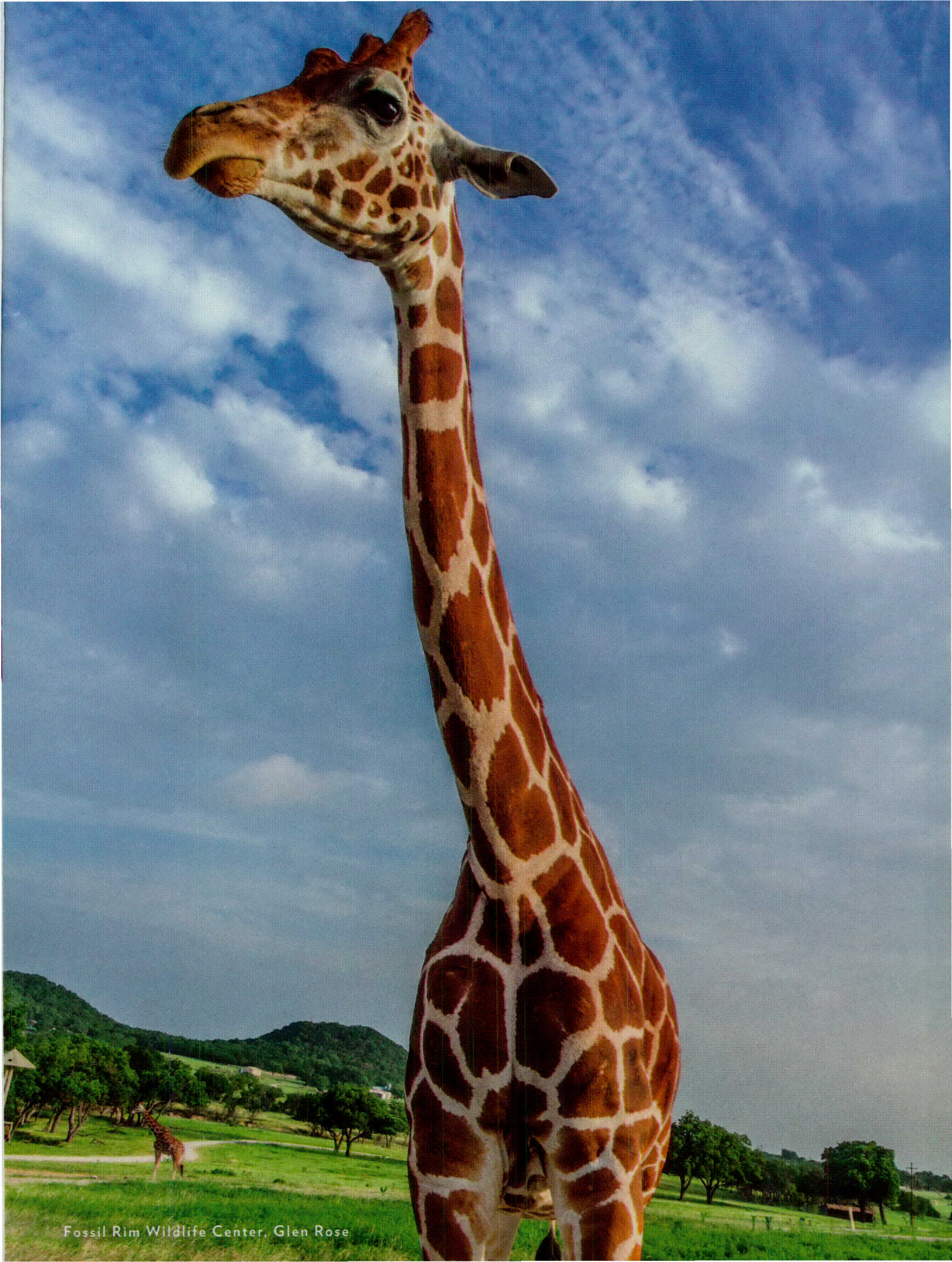
April 30-May 30, the Wildflower Center's McDermott Learning Center will showcase flowery images from across the state, including from several photographers featured in this issue. The ***Texas Highways* photo exhibit** is part of the Wildflower Center's annual **Wildflower Days** (March 14-May 31). The lineup of springtime activities and exhibits includes the **Family Wildflower Cave Tour** on March 26; Spring Native Plant Sale April 8-10; a **Nature/Wildflower Photography workshop** April 30; **National Wildflower Week** walks and talks May 2-8; and so much more. Call 512/232-0100; www.wildflower.org.

Our thanks to Minette Marr, plant conservationist, and Joe Marcus, program coordinator, at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center for their help with wildflower information and photo identification.

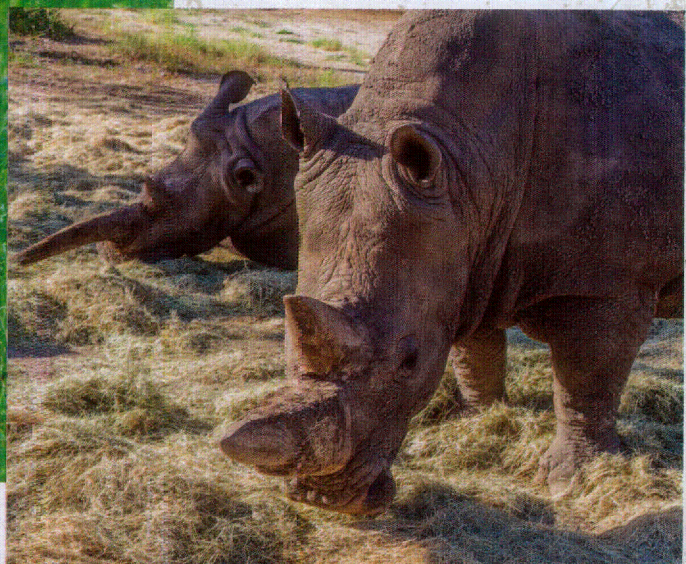
TALK TO—*AND FEED*—THE ANIMALS
AT FOSSIL RIM WILDLIFE CENTER
AND NATURAL BRIDGE WILDLIFE RANCH

something WILD

text by PAULA DISBROWE
photographs by WILL VAN OVERBEEK



Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Glen Rose



NATURE PRESERVED

Facing page, at Fossil Rim: A giraffe's tongue can wrap around a single pellet of food. This page: European red deer and a cheetah at Fossil Rim; white rhinos at Natural Bridge.

SURE, IT'S FUN to hand-feed giraffes through the sunroof, but there are other important reasons why Texas drive-through wildlife parks matter.

IN THE SPIRIT OF OUTDOOR ADVENTURE, I wanted to kick off summer vacation with an experience that connected our kids to the ruggedly beautiful Texas landscape, so we hit the road on the last day of school, right after the final bell. Our Subaru was packed with road-trip essentials—snacks, sunscreen, and swimsuits—as we headed north from Austin on US 183 for our first visit to Glen Rose.

Known as the "Dinosaur Capital of Texas," Glen Rose has long been considered a great family destination (particularly for those with Brontosaurus-obsessed kids). Millions of years ago, an expansive sea covered the region. When the water receded it left a lush terrain and, over time, fossilized impressions that tell the story of its early beginnings (nearby Dinosaur Valley State Park boasts some of the best-preserved dinosaur tracks in the country). With an abundance of hiking and mountain-bike trails, canoeing and tubing, camping, and swimming, Glen Rose is also a mecca for outdoors enthusiasts.

But on this trip we're seeking something wilder than sauropod tracks: Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, home to approximately 1,100 animals (more than half of them in the threatened or endangered categories) that roam freely on the preserve's 1,800 acres. The park offers drive-through and guided tours that allow visitors to get close to natives like white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, and roadrunners, plus show-stealing exotics like gemsbok (their distinctive facial marking inspired African tribal masks), chestnut-colored bongos (the largest variety of forest antelope), and wildebeest. Beyond the thrill of Instagram moments with zebras and the chance to fling snacks to American bison or aoudad, the most extraordinary thing about Fossil Rim is its commitment to the preservation and restoration of wildlife and natural habitats.

"What sets us apart from other parks is that our animals are raised in groups, flocks, and herds, so eventually we're able to reintroduce them to natural habitats and they retain that social behavior," explains Warren Lewis, director of marketing for Fossil Rim. The park's expansive property makes that work possible. "We have about one acre for each animal," Warren adds proudly.

Fossil Rim focuses on species survival and recovery by managing carefully selected species in conditions that allow for their natural behaviors. When these animals produce offspring, they're available for reintroduction and recovery programs around the world.

For instance, Fossil Rim is currently the most prolific breeder of cheetah in North America (18 cubs were born in the last 12 months). And the park's team is currently working with the Sahara Conservation Fund to build a "world herd" of scimitar-horned oryx in Abu Dhabi (the species has been extinct in the wild since 1999). In the coming months, the park will ship around 50 animals there every three to six months, where they'll remain in a large holding area, until they have 500. Once the herd stabilizes, they'll be shipped to Chad and released in the wild.

Another example of a highly endangered species that Fossil Rim is replenishing is the Attwater's prairie chicken, a native of the Gulf Coast regions of Texas and Louisiana. The striking black and white bird with a bright yellow head is known for its springtime courtship dance. "We currently hold about 54 percent of their population," Warren tells me. "Each year we send around 400 of them to a refuge in Eagle Lake, near Sealy. We're actually close to creating a sustainable population."

In other words, Fossil Rim's residents provide an insurance population, so that when bad things happen elsewhere they can prevent species from becoming truly extinct. The most sensitive examples, like Attwater's prairie chicken, the Mexican gray wolf, and southern black rhino, are kept in the Jim Jackson Intensive Management Area. To minimize disruption, it's only accessible on guided tours (advance reservations required).

When we arrived at Fossil Rim, we purchased a few bags of feed ($10 each) and set out on the 9.5-mile Scenic Wildlife Drive, the most common way to experience the park. Our kids immediately focused on the fun: Following the example of cars in front of us, we allowed them to ride standing up, with heads popping through the sunroof (no seat belts, a definite family first!) as we drove slowly along the dusty road. We encountered animals immediately, and everywhere. A cluster of oak trees provided a shady spot to feed giraffes by hand ("Their tongues are black!" my son shouted at his sister, who was laughing in the backseat), and we snapped close-ups of zebras and a strapping axis buck.

Incidentally, giraffes are the only animals that you're allowed to feed by hand (for all others, you toss the pellets from your car window), although some may try to convince you otherwise. Make no mistake: Fossil Rim's residents have figured out that cars equal an endless buffet. I wouldn't keep a bag of Cheetos on the center console, for instance, when an ostrich or emu comes poking around, lest you want a long neck extended across your lap. (Emus are gentle and curious, Warren assures me, while ostriches are more aggressive and motivated by food.)

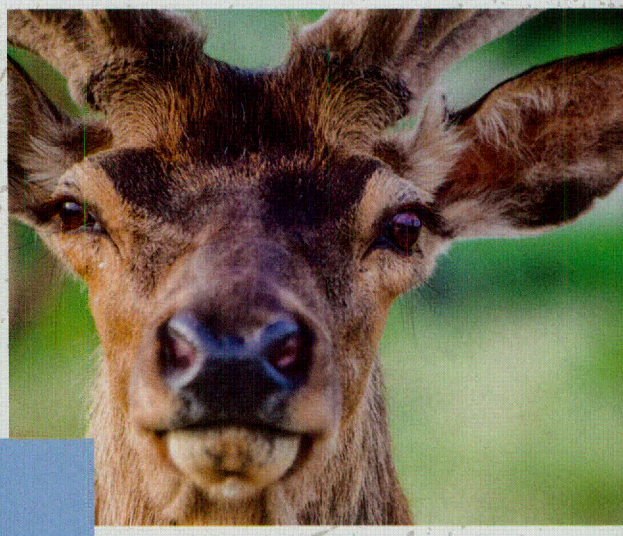
When we reached the Overlook, Fossil Rim's highest scenic viewpoint, we were ready to stretch our legs and have lunch. Overlook Café serves a simple menu of burgers and wrap sandwiches, along with spectacular views of the juniper, red oaks, cedar elms, and prickly pear cactus that color the surrounding hillsides. We sat outside on the deck, nibbling fries and sipping cold drinks as we enjoyed the simple pleasure of a day together with the warm afternoon sun on our backs. Afterwards, we walked to the Children's Animal Center to make a few friends. We brushed down an obviously pampered and very obliging pygmy goat, watched a wandering pot-bellied pig and a massive 120-pound African spurred tortoise, and examined an 80-pound rhino skull. Along the way, we read trail markers to identify plants like bluebonnets and blue salvia that are integral to the plateau's ecosystem. Since no road trip is complete without a souvenir, we also hit the Nature Store and left with pink giraffe headbands and a plush toy wolf. Proceeds from many of the gifts (including art, jewelry, books, and toys) support indigenous peoples.

After our full and dusty day, we were ready to cool down. Luckily, we'd booked our accommodations based on the awesomeness of its pool. Oakdale Park is a well-kept retro motor inn and campsite and home to the "Oakdale Plunge," one of the oldest pools in Texas (it was dug in 1925 by horse and mule teams!). After we settled into "Ferndale," a cute stone cottage with vintage guitars hung over the two beds, we grabbed towels and hit the water. With a high-spraying fountain in the center of the pool, zippy water slide, '80s rock blasting from overhead speakers, and countless cannon balls off the diving board—it felt like we were splashing into summer in just the right way. And it occurred to me that my husband and I were savoring the fun as much as our kids.

There are plenty of restaurants in the area, but we'd chosen to bring a cooler and make the most of our cabin experience. After a picnic dinner, we crossed the road to climb the giant boulders alongside the rushing Paluxy River and watch the last of the light fade over Big Rocks Park.

The next time we visit Fossil Rim, we plan to deepen the experience by settling in for the night. Fossil Rim has its own lodging in the form of comfortable, safari-style tented cabins. The park also offers special events like photography workshops, the behind-the-scenes "Animal Keeper" tour, and "Discover After Dark," an evening excursion that allows guests to venture out using spotlights with special red lenses to view nocturnal wildlife like owls and long-haired rabbits.

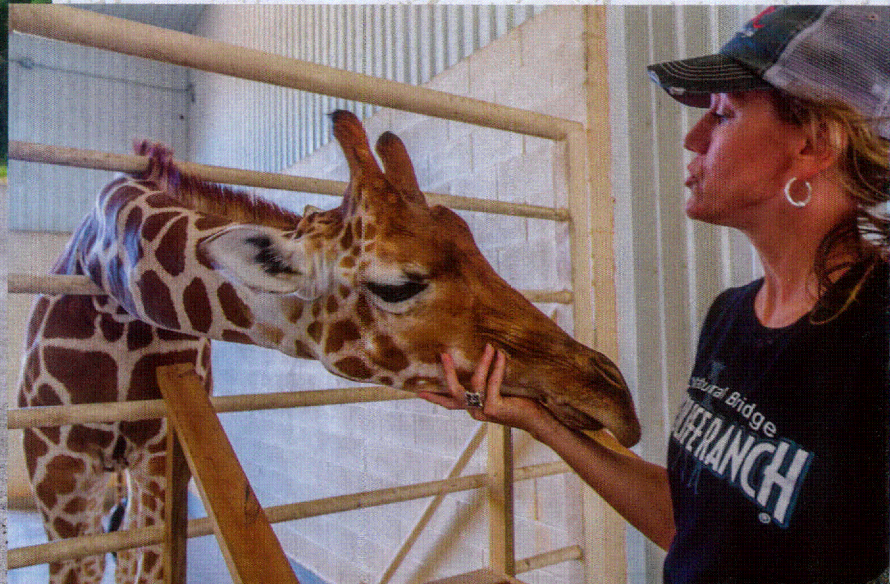
CLOSER TO OUR AUSTIN HOME AND JUST off I-35, between San Antonio and New Braunfels, Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch calls itself a "Texas-style African safari." For good reason: Driving through its 400 acres, past playful ring-tailed lemurs and a mud-caked white rhinoceros, definitely feels like an



READY FOR CLOSE-UPS
Above and left: See zebras and European red deer on Fossil Rim's guided and self-guided tours. In the wild, Arabian oryx, shown below at Natural Bridge, are classified as "vulnerable" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

ANIMAL ATTRACTION

Among the menagerie at Natural Bridge find ostriches, Ankole-Watusi cattle, bongos, and a curious reticulated giraffe named Buddy.



exotic world apart from the often-congested interstate a few miles east.

Last fall, I toured the park with Tiffany Soechting, the ranch's animal specialist and marketing director, and learned the operation is a family affair. Tiffany started working at NBWR in 1985, a year after it opened, and eventually married the son of the owners. The couple, along with Tiffany's brother-in-law and sister-in-law, went on to raise their children on the property, which gave them a pretty awesome yard to frolic in. ("It can be pretty funny giving out dinner party directions to our house," Tiffany confessed.)

Natural Bridge is the longest-running wildlife park in Texas, and the most visited, but it has continuously evolved to keep visitors (many of them season-pass holders) engaged. In the last 10 years it has expanded the Petting Barnyard, Lemur Island (a habitat for ring-tailed lemurs), The Trading Post gift shop, and the Safari Camp Grill (which serves burgers, salads, nachos, and homemade salsa and guacamole). As we bounced across creek beds and cattle guards, and past ponds where fallow deer had gathered to drink, Tiffany identified several examples of the 40 species of exotic, native, and endangered residents.

The park's newest section, Tower Creek, was recently created in an area of the property that had not been developed. "It's so scenic down there," Tiffany says, "and it created a tranquil area for giraffes, sable antelope, and Nile lechwe to grow their own separate herds."

My tour ended at the giraffe barn, which is actually front-and-center at the entrance, but Tiffany had saved their most famous residents—two rare twin reticulated giraffes—for last. Wasswa and Nakato (aka Buddy) were born at the ranch in May 2013. The birth was picked up by CNN and watched around the world, and a couple of stars were born. As a result, Natural Bridge recently launched their Giraffe Ambassador Program, a monthly educational workshop that's meant to encourage support and care for the world's tallest mammal. Each participant receives a field journal, T-shirt, and certificates as well as an opportunity to interact with Buddy. (Sadly, Wasswa died suddenly this winter from a rare illness.) A portion of the program fee ($30) funds giraffe research in Africa. Tiffany admits that the class, held at "Longneck Learning Center," was originally geared to kids, but a growing number of adults have enrolled.

"After the twins were born we started to learn how vulnerable giraffes are in the wild," says Tiffany. "In the 1970s, there were about 400,000 in the world, and today there are only about 80,000. If something isn't done now and current trends continue, giraffe populations will be extinct in the wild within the next 10 years. This program is our first step in raising awareness." The monthly program will culminate with the first annual Texas Giraffe Day on May 10 (see their website for details).

Tiffany hopes that the school tours, interactive discovery programs, and the special nose-to-nose moments that Natural Bridge provides will leave a lasting impression. "We sneak in the education, even if it's just the memories our visitors take with them. When an animal is right in your face, you have an experience that you talk about forever; and it creates a connection to all animals."

At the heart of both Fossil Rim and Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch is education—raising awareness of the diversity of animal and plant species essential to the planet's sustainability. Spring, the season of rebirth, is a particularly exciting time to visit both parks for obvious reasons: blooms and babies. If you're lucky, you might even witness something profound, like the birth of a new resident. At a time when dwindling natural resources face a serious threat, wildlife parks provide a vital connection to our natural heritage, and foster an understanding of how we can help protect its precious diversity. And it feels good to make the time to step out of your life and take it all in. ★

Writer Paula Disbrowe enjoyed watching her kids feed the giraffes through the sunroof: "The wonder of seeing those long necks and large heads gracefully descend to nibble feed from those small hands." While shooting at Fossil Rim, staff photographer Will van Overbeek says one of the cheetahs seemed to be thinking, "Why didn't that monkey bring me something to eat?"

WILDLIFE RANCHES

Following is contact information for the wildlife ranches and other attractions mentioned in the story. Contact each ranch for details on hours, admission fees, tours, lodging, special camps, programs, and events. For area information, go to www.glenrosetexas.net, www.innewbraunfels.com, and www.visitsanantonio.com.

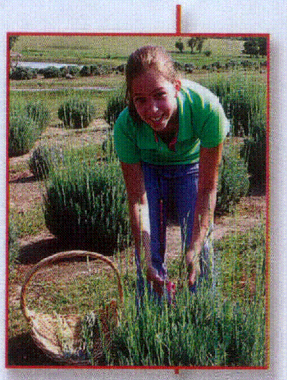
Fossil Rim Wildlife Center is at 2299 County Road 2008 in Glen Rose, 254/897-2960; www.fossilrim.org.

Dinosaur Valley State Park is at 1629 Park Rd. 59 in Glen Rose, 254/897-4588; www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/dinosaur-valley.

Oakdale Park is at 1019 NE Barnard St. in Glen Rose, 254/897-2321; www.oakdalepark.com.

Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch is at 26515 Natural Bridge Caverns Rd., between San Antonio and New Braunfels. Call 830/438-7400; www.wildliferanchtexas.com.

Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site
WhereTexasBecameTexas.org | 936-878-2214



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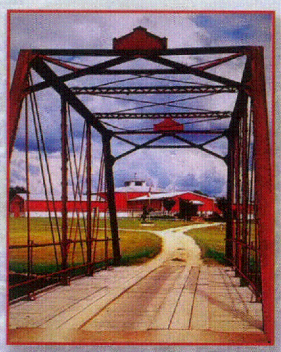

Saddlehorn Winery
Tasting Room & Event Venue
SaddlehornWinery.com

Hermann Furniture
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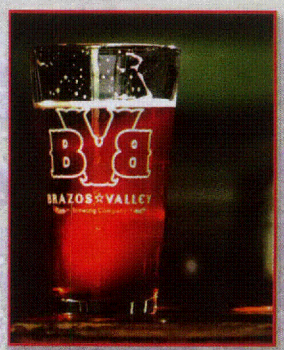
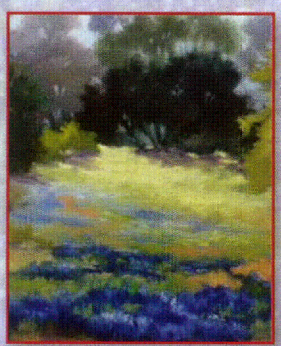


Brazos Valley Brewing Co.
Hand Crafted, Independent Beer
BrazosValleyBrewery.com



Downtown Art Gallery
Local Artists, Brenham
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Horseshoe Junction
Family Fun Park
HorseshoeJunction.com

Heritage Homes Tours
April 10, 2016
GiddingsStoneMansion.com

Nathan's BBQ
Original 'True' Texas BBQ
979-251-9900

Burton Cotton Gin Festival *April 15-16*
CottonGinMuseum.org

Funky Art Café
Where good, fun food evolves
FunkyArtCafe.com

Photo: Justin Calhoun

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ChappellHillHistoricalSociety.org

The Barnhill House
An old-fashioned toy store
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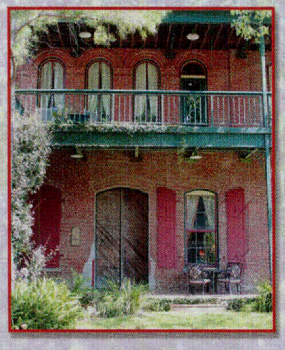
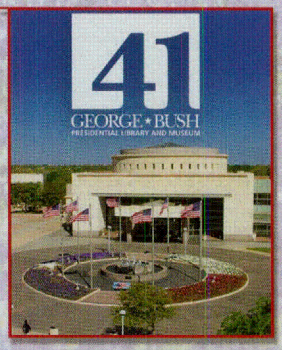
Photo: Heather Webb-Robards

Antique Carousel Rides
Sat. 11am-4pm & Sun. 1pm-4pm
cityofbrenham.org/parks



Ant Street Inn
Vintage accommodations
antstreetinn.com



George Bush Presidential Library and Museum
College Station, bush41.org

Windy Winery
Where Time Stands Still
979-836-3252

SPRING & SUMMER EVENTS

March 18-April 3
- Spring Round Top Antique Show

April 15-17
- Poetry at Round Top, Festival Hill Institute

May 7-8
- ArtWalk 2016 Sponsored by ARTS for Rural Texas, Fayetteville

June 11- July 16
- 46th Music Festival Round Top Festival Institute

July 4
- 166th 4th of July Parade and Celebration

July 14-August 7
- 46th Season of Shakespeare at Winedale

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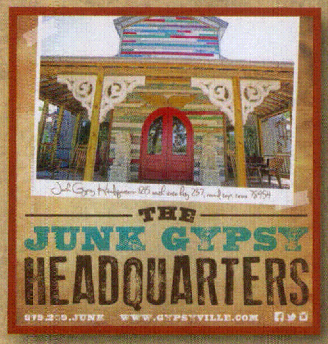
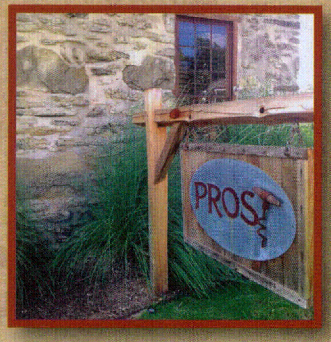


The Junk Gypsy

www.gypsyville.com

979-249-JUNK



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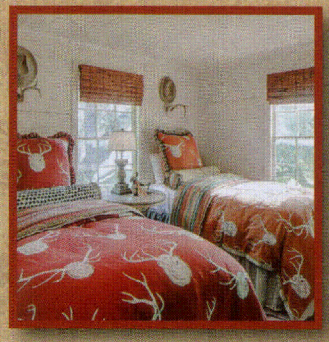

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roundtopvintagemarket.com

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The San Antonio Blues

ROBERT JOHNSON'S HISTORIC RECORDINGS AT THE GUNTER HOTEL

Text by **MICHAEL CORCORAN**

CROSS ROADS CAT
The Gunter Hotel's Bar 414 serves cocktails named after Robert Johnson songs, such as "Terraplane Blues."

PHOTO: Michael Amador

ARGUABLY THE MOST MONUmental date in the history of recorded music in Texas was November 23, 1936, when Robert Johnson created the template for electric blues, which became rock-and-roll, in Room 414 of the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio.

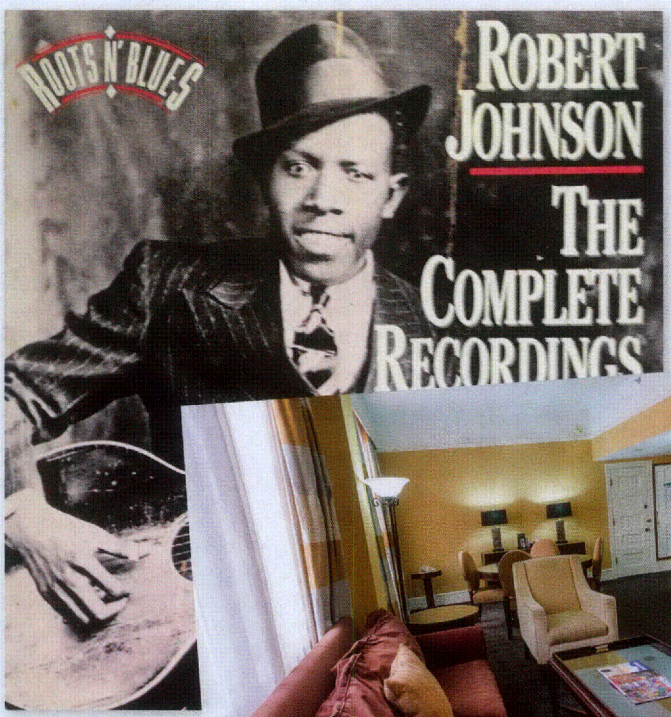
The mysterious Mississippi bluesman cut eight tracks for the American Recording Company that day, including "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom" and "Sweet Home Chicago," both of which became classics. Johnson returned to the Gunter a few days later to lay down "Cross Roads Blues," which British supergroup Cream would make famous as "Crossroads" 30 years later.

Johnson was "the greatest blues singer who ever lived" according to Eric Clapton, and he ranks No. 5 on Rolling Stone's list of all-time great guitarists. Yet the Delta bluesman died poor and obscure in 1938 when he was 27 years old—allegedly poisoned by a jealous husband.

Recognizing Johnson's cultural significance, the Sheraton Gunter Hotel is doing its best to keep alive the spirit of its influential former guest. The Gunter opened in 1909, a block from the San Antonio River, and sits in the thick of downtown. A 2014 renovation included the installation of a large, mirrored portrait of a nattily attired Johnson, a black cat crossing his path, to greet visitors in the lobby.

Also in the lobby, a historical plaque dedicated by the San Antonio Blues Society in 2001 commemorates the Johnson sessions, and the group maintains two window boxes with Johnson photos and album art. Bar 414, the hotel's speakeasy-themed lounge, is decorated with abstract photos of Johnson (only two photos of the bluesman are known to exist) and names some of its cocktails after Johnson's classic blues numbers. There's the "Come On In My Kitchen" (gin and grapefruit), "I'm a Steady Rollin' Man" (a whiskey sour variation), "Terraplane Blues" (a Moscow Mule), and "Hellhound On My Trail" (a Mai Tai), among others. Bar 414's soundtrack is strictly blues—a mix heavy on Johnson and those he influenced, like Muddy Waters and Albert King—and the bar

THE SHERATON GUNTER HOTEL
is at 205 E. Houston St. in San Antonio. Call 210/227-3241; www.sheratongunter.com.



ROOM 414
In 1936, producer Don Law recorded at the Gunter, placing the musicians in the parlor of room 414.

PHOTO: Michael Amador, *Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings* album courtesy Michael Corcoran

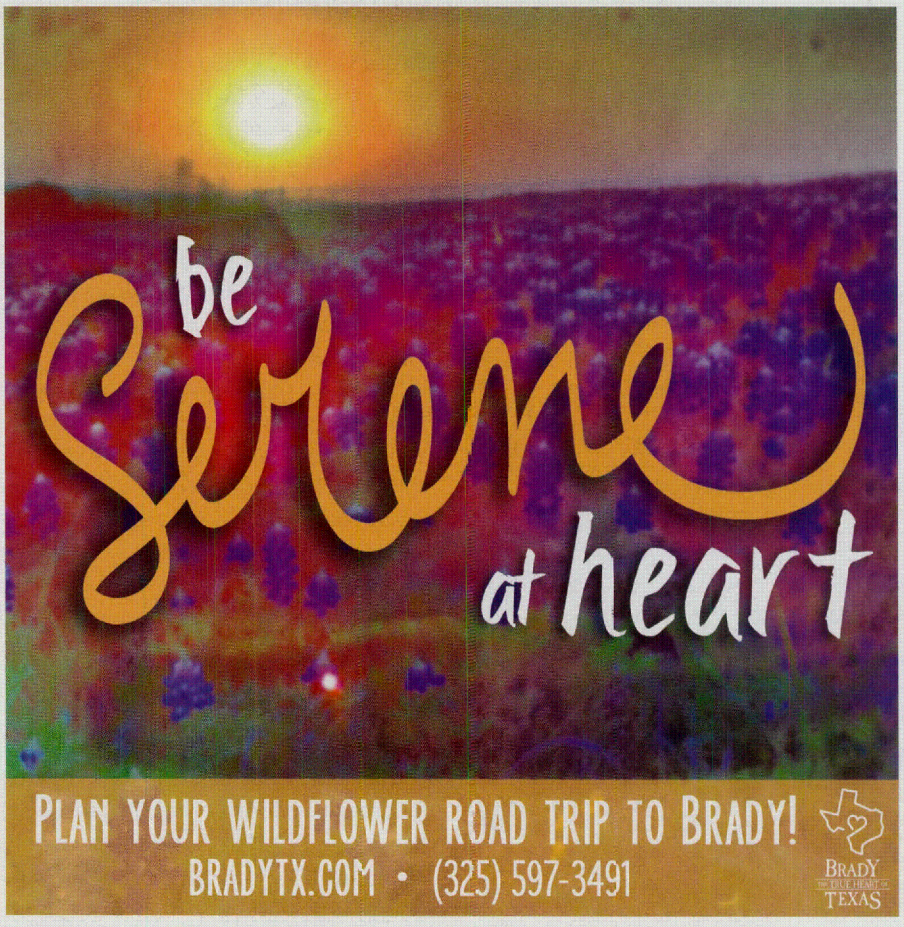
occasionally hosts blues musicians.

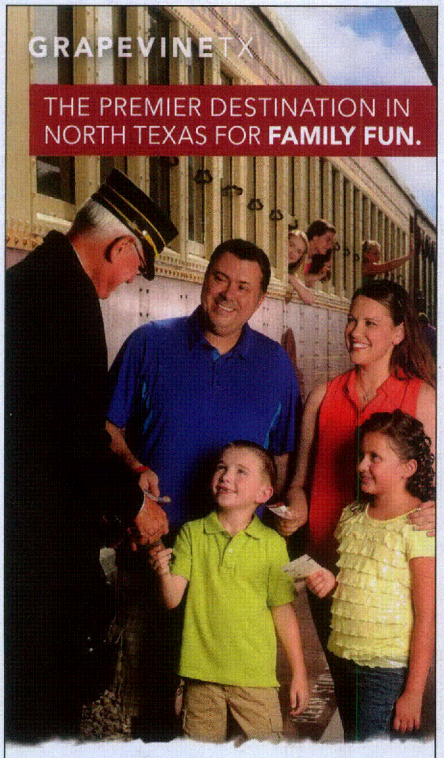
Back in 1936, producer Don Law, who ran ARC's Dallas office, converted Room 414 into a studio, setting the soundboard in the bedroom and placing the musicians in the parlor. He recorded nearly a dozen acts the same week as Johnson's recordings. Among them were Al Dexter, whose "Honky Tonk Blues" was the first country song with that subgenre in the title, and the country gospel Chuck Wagon Gang, who outsold Johnson on Columbia until a 1990 reissue of Johnson's *King of the Delta Blues Singers* went platinum.

Until fairly recently, few people knew about Johnson's connection to the Gunter. There were no photos or signage; "414" was what a bagel and a coffee might cost, with tax, in the hotel café. But since the Rolling Stones, who have recorded such Johnson tunes as "Love In Vain" and "Stop Breaking Down," played their second-ever United States show in San Antonio in June 1964, British bands have made pilgrimages to the Gunter, if only to ride the elevator to the fourth floor and run their fingers over the room's placard.

Hoping to channel Johnson's musical spirit, at least two acts have recorded in Room 414 in recent years, including John Mellencamp in 2009 for the album *No Better Than This*. The 475-square-foot parlor with high ceilings has a couch but no bed; a door connects the parlor to the bedroom in Room 413. Anyone can request the room. "People have always asked to stay in room 414," said hotel Manager Tim McDonald, "but it's only been since the new owners took over [Axle Capital Group in 2013] that we've emphasized our place in music history. It's a great selling point."

Gospel and blues singer Steve Johnson wasn't just looking for musical roots when he came to the Gunter in November 2015. "I first became aware of Robert Johnson's music from the *Blues Brothers* movie," said Steve, of Crystal Springs, Mississippi. "I came out of it singing 'Sweet Home Chicago,' and my grandma said, 'Your grandfather wrote that song!'"





The 15-year-old Johnson was stunned. "I only knew that my real granddaddy was a blues singer named Robert Johnson. I didn't know his music went anywhere," said Steve, now president of the Robert Johnson Blues Foundation.

Steve Johnson's singing had been strictly gospel until the past few years, when he started delving into his grandfather's music as leader of the Robert Johnson International Blues Revue. Steve's father is Claud Johnson, who was named Robert Johnson's sole heir in 1998 after a lengthy court battle. Claud Johnson passed away in June 2015.

"I've been thinking about recording an album in Room 414 for awhile," Steve said in November. "This room is a big part of musical history, but it's also part of my family's history, and I felt something special the very first time I stepped inside here," he added. "There was such a closeness to the granddaddy I'd never met. My father was only six when his father passed away."

Steve came to Room 414 mainly to record vocals. He placed his mic in the corner, facing away from the engineer, just as his grandfather famously did. "The producer [Don Law] said it was because Robert Johnson was shy, had stage fright," Steve said. "But listen to this." Steve sang, "C'mon, baby don't you want to go" in his booming voice—and, indeed, the corner sound reflection gave it a natural reverb.

"I came to the Gunter because I want him to be a part of what I'm doing," Steve said, adding that he sometimes felt his grandfather in the room, watching him.

Robert Johnson enjoyed moderate success with his first single, "Terraplane Blues," which he recorded at the Gunter. His commercial promise prompted American Recording Company to invite him back to Texas for a recording with the company's Brunswick/Vocalion label, this time in Dallas. The June 1937 recordings took place in a makeshift studio on the third floor of 508 Park Avenue, an Art Deco building just a few blocks from today's City Hall. Johnson died not much more than a year later.

The Stewpot, a community ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, acquired 508 Park Avenue in 2011 and is in the process of renovating it into a cultural center with museum exhibits, a recording studio, art studio, amphitheater, and community garden—all themed around the building's musical legacy. With exhibits scheduled to open over the next couple of years, 508 Park Avenue is sure to be another must-visit spot for Robert Johnson fans—just as British Invasion bands continue to make an obligatory stop at the Gunter whenever passing through San Antonio.

ROBERT JOHNSON'S DALLAS RECORDINGS

Learn more about Robert Johnson's 1937 Dallas recordings and the project to renovate 508 Park Ave. at **www.508park.org** and **www.encoreparkdallas.org**.

The Gunter is across the street from the 1929 Majestic Theatre, where Cheap Trick recently played and came over afterwards to pay their respects. The Yardbirds made a similar visit last year, said Steve Schnipper, treasurer of the San Antonio Blues Society.

Each November, the Blues Society hosts the Robert Johnson S.A. Sessions concert at Sam's Burger Joint to commemorate the historic San Antonio recordings of 1936. The show typically consists of a couple of local acts and a headlining national act that's been strongly influenced by Robert Johnson—blues musicians such as Guy Davis, Rory Block, Charlie Musselwhite, and Guy Forsyth. Blues bands are drawn to the concept of honoring Johnson in the city where he first recorded, Schnipper said, even if the local connection remains relatively unknown in San Antonio.

"It's truly a shame that most people in San Antonio have no idea of how closely San Antonio is tied to recorded blues music history," Schnipper said. ★

EVENTS

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

April's travel spotlights:

HILL COUNTRY > *Austin*

Wish You Were Here

Postcards are gloriously enticing—intended to generate fond memories with beauty, grandeur, and humor. The Texas State Library and Archives in Austin explores the topic in *Wish You Were Here: Postcards from the Texas State Archives*. Open April 4-September 16, the exhibit features about 55 postcards (40 on display at a time) from 20th-Century Texas. The cards bear historical drawings and photos of attractions like the Hotel Galvez and Galveston Seawall and the Beaumont oilfields at night, as well as accompanying photos and documents, including a 1927 menu from the still-popular Camino Real Hotel in El Paso. www.tsl.texas.gov.

PANHANDLE PLAINS > *Turkey*

Take me Back to Turkey

Western Swing musicians and fans will flock to Turkey on the last weekend of April for the 45th annual Bob Wills Day. The tribute to the "Father of Western Swing," who honed his chops in the area, features dances on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights (April 28-30) and afternoon shows at the Bob Wills Museum. On Saturday, the event culminates with a parade, barbecue cook-off, fiddlers contest, and free outdoor concert. The acts on stage—among them Asleep at the Wheel, Billy Mata, Jason Roberts, and Jody Nix—all specialize in Wills' innovative blend of jazz, blues, and hillbilly music. www.bobwillsday.com.

GULF COAST > *Houston*

Honoring Olivewood

Incorporated as Houston's first African American graveyard in 1875, Olivewood Cemetery is the final resting place of roughly 4,000 Houstonians who helped build the city, from slaves to ministers, teachers, and dentists. Houston's National Museum of Funeral History showcases the cemetery in *Honoring Olivewood*, a collection of contemporary photographs taken by Kasey French, now a college student. Sales of a book compiling the photographs benefit the nonprofit Descendants of Olivewood, a group formed in 2003 to restore the cemetery after it was abandoned and choked with vegetation over the previous three decades. *Honoring Olivewood* runs until May 29. www.nmfh.org; www.descendantsofolivewood.org.

PINEY WOODS > *Palestine*

Wagon Dash

Race announcers may belabor the phrase "hold onto your hats," but the exhortation rings true at the 1836 Chuck Wagon Race at the Diamond B Ranch near Palestine. The races (April 22-24) pit chuck-wagon teams pulled by horses and mules, hurtling perilously through an open-field course, kicking up dirt and careening around barrels. The event, which runs April 15-25, commemorates Texas Independence and also includes camping, live music, trail rides, mounted shooting, horse clinics, horse auctions, and other events. www.1836chuckwagonrace.com.

PHOTOS: *(from top)* Courtesy TSLAC; Courtesy Estate of Bob Wills/OKPOP Museum; Courtesy Kasey French; © Julia Robinson

BIG BEND COUNTRY

ALPINE: 30th Annual *Trappings of Texas* April 14-May 15. Museum of the Big Bend at Sul Ross State University. www.museumofthebigbend.com 432/837-8143

EL PASO: Poppy Fest 2016 April 2. El Paso Museum of Archeology. www.archaeology.elpasotexas.gov 915/755-4332

EL PASO: Alfresco Fridays April 8, 15, 22, 29. Convention Center Plaza. www.elpasolive.com 915/534-0600

FORT STOCKTON: Big Bend Open-Road Race April 20-23. On US 285. www.bborr.com 432/336-2264

MIDLAND: CAF High Sky Wing Hops and Props April 9. CAF High Sky Wing. www.highskywing.org 432/235-7007

PECOS: Sadie Hawkins Couples Golf Tournament April 23-24. Reeves County Golf Course. 432/447-2858

VAN HORN: Building Bridges Art Show April 13-15. Van Horn Convention Center. www.vanhorntexas.us 432/283-2682

GULF COAST

BEAUMONT: South Texas State Fair March 24-April 3. Ford Park. www.ymbl.org

BROWNSVILLE: Living History April 2. Palo Alto Battlefield NHP. www.nps.gov/paal/index.htm 956/541-2785 ext. 333

CORPUS CHRISTI: Big Bloom Plant Sale and Garden Festival April 2. South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center. www.stxbot.org 361/852-2100

CORPUS CHRISTI: Birds and Spring Migration Short Course April 9. South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center. www.stxbot.org 361/852-2100

CORPUS CHRISTI: Buc Days April 14-30. Corpus Christi Bayfront and other locations. www.bucdays.com

GALVESTON: The Grand Kids Festival April 2. The Grand 1894 Opera House. www.thegrand.com 800/821-1894

GALVESTON: Galveston Food and Wine Festival April 14-17. Various locations. www.galvestonfoodandwinefestival.com

GALVESTON: JA-GA Reggae Festival April 23-24. Galveston Seawall. www.jagafest.com

GALVESTON: Galveston Historic Homes Tour April 29-30. Galveston Historical Foundation. www.galvestonhistory.org 409/765-7834

Experience down home hospitality that can only be found in Waxahachie. You'll find the legendary Ellis County Courthouse, plus numerous unique dining and shopping opportunities. Upcoming events include: Cinco de Mayo Festival, Crossroads of Texas Film Festival and Scarborough Renaissance Festival.

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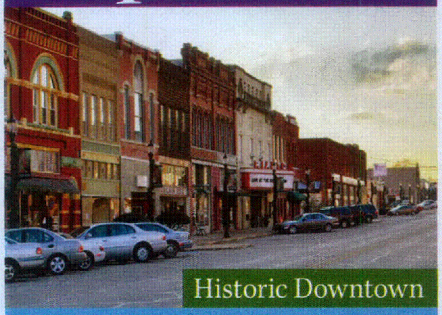

- APRIL 1-3 – INTERURBAN FILM FESTIVAL
- APRIL 2 – CULTURE OF ART FESTIVAL
- APRIL 16 – BIG TEXAS BREAKFAST (70TH ANNIV.) EISENHOWER BIRTHPLACE
- APRIL 30 – DOC HOLLIDAY FESTIVAL
- APRIL 30 – RED RIVER RAILROAD MUSEUM (25TH ANNIV.) OPEN HOUSE
- COMFORTABLE LODGING / EVENT CENTER

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GALVESTON: ArtWalk April 16. Various locations. www.galveston.com/artwalk 800/821-1894

HOUSTON: *The Secret of the Hanging Egg: Salvador Dalí* Through June 19. The Menil Collection. www.menil.org

HOUSTON: *La Virgen de Guadalupe: Empress of the Americas* Through September 5. Houston Museum of Natural Science. www.hmns.org

HOUSTON: *Deco Nights: Evenings in the Jazz Age* Through June 5. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. www.mfah.org

HOUSTON: *Mixed and Mastered: Turntable Kitsch* Through May 8. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. www.crafthouston.org 713/529-4848

HOUSTON: *William N. Copley Retrospective* Through July 24. The Menil Collection. www.menil.org

HOUSTON: *Sculpted in Steel: Art Deco Automobiles and Motorcycles, 1929–1940* Through May 30. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. www.mfah.org

HOUSTON: *Around the World in 80 Days* March 4-April 3. Alley Theatre. www.visithoustontexas.com

HOUSTON: *The Night of the Iguana* March 4-April 3. Alley Theatre. www.alleytheatre.org

HOUSTON: Lawndale Art Center Exhibits March 11-April 16. Lawndale Art Center. www.lawndaleartcenter.org

HOUSTON: *Profile of a Houston Oil Family: Photographs from the Staiti/ Reisner Family Collection* March 16-July 2. The Heritage Society.

HOUSTON: *Voices Appeared: Silent Cinema and Medieval Music* April 1. Wortham Center. www.houstonearlymusic.org 281/846-4222 or 713/524-5050

HOUSTON: NCAA Men's Final Four April 2-4. NRG Park. www.visithoustontexas.com

HOUSTON: WorldFest: Houston International Film Festival April 8-17. Various locations. www.worldfest.org 713/965-9955

HOUSTON: Art Car Parade April 16. Downtown. www.visithoustontexas.com

HOUSTON: Houston Barbecue Festival April 16. NRG Park. www.houbbq.com 832/454-6106

HOUSTON: Houston Wing Open House April 16-17. West Houston Airport. www.houstonwing.org 281/579-2131

HOUSTON: Japan Festival April 16. www.visithoustontexas.com 713/963-0121

HOUSTON: *High Society: The Portraits of Franz X. Winterhalter* April 17-August 14. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. www.mfah.org

HOUSTON: Bayou City Art Festival Memorial Park April 29-May 1. Memorial Park. www.artcolonyassociation.org 281/571-3102

HUMBLE: Shell Houston Open March 28-April 3. Redstone Golf Club's Tournament Course. www.visithoustontexas.com 281/454-7000

KATY: Katy Jazz Festival April 29-30. Katy High School Performing Arts Center. www.katyjazzfestival.com 832/444-5756

LA PORTE: San Jacinto Day Festival and Battle Re-enactment April 23. San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site. www.sanjacinto-museum.org

ORANGE: Art in the Park April 9. Stark Park. www.orangetexas.org 409/883-1010

PALACIOS: Palacios Trail Riders Association Trail Ride April 2-3. 361/920-2719

PORT ARANSAS: IFA Redfish Tournament April 1-3. Robert's Point Park. www.redfishtour.com

PORT ARANSAS: Texas SandFest April 29-May 1. Mustang Island Beach, between beach markers 9-14. www.texassandfest.com 361/758-9800

PORT ARTHUR: Carnival des Cajuns April 16. Carl A. Parker Multipurpose Center. www.setxac.org 409/835-2787

PORT NECHES: RiverFest: Thunder on the Neches April 27-May 1. Port Neches Park. www.portneches chamber.com 409/722-9154

ROCKPORT: Tour of Homes and Boats April 9-10. Various locations. 361/729-5519

SEABROOK: Keels and Wheels Concours D'Elegance April 23-24. Lakewood Yacht Club. www.keels-wheels.com 713/521-0105

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND: Beach-N-Biker Fest April 15-17. South Padre Island Convention Centre. www.sopadre.com 956/761-3000

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND: Sand Crab Beach Run April 30. www.sopadre.com 956/761-3000

SPRING: Texas Crawfish and Music Festival April 29-May 1, 6-8. Old Town Spring. www.texascrawfishfestival.com 281/353-9310

SUGAR LAND: *Amazing Butterflies* Through May 15. The Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land. www.hmns.org 281/313-2277

SUGAR LAND: Sugar Land Wine and Food Affair April 6-10. Various locations. www.sugarlandtownsquare.com 281/276-6000

SUGAR LAND: Sip 'n' Stroll April 9. Constellation Field. www.SugarLandSkeeters.com 281/240-4487

SUGAR LAND: Corvette Club of Houston Spring Car Show April 23. Sugar Land Town Square. www.sugarlandtownsquare.com 281/276-6000

TOMBALL: Rails and Tails Mudbug Festival April 30-May 1. Historic Downtown Depot. www.tomballtx.gov 281/351-5484

VICTORIA: Historic Homes Tour April 2-3. Various locations. www.vpitx.org 361/573-1878

VICTORIA: Polo at McFaddin April 2. McFaddin Ranch. www.navemusem.com 361/575-8227

VICTORIA: Scott Taylor Band Crawfish Festival April 9. Victoria Community Center. www.thescotttaylorband.com

VICTORIA: Art Car Victoria April 16. Downtown. www.explorevictoriatexas.com 361/485-3116

VICTORIA: JAM Fest April 16. Downtown. www.jamfestvictoria.com

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN: *Shakespeare in Print and Performance* Through May 29. Harry Ransom Center. www.hrc.utexas.edu 512/471-8949

AUSTIN: *Texas Czechs: Rooted in Tradition* Through June 9. State Capitol Visitors Center. www.polkaworks.org 512/799-6842

AUSTIN: *Come As You Are: Art of the 1990s* Through May 15. Blanton Museum of Art. www.blantonmuseum.org

AUSTIN: *Our Global Kitchen* March 12-July 24. Bullock Museum. www.TheStoryofTexas.com

AUSTIN: *Obra Grafica: Selections from the Mexic-Arte Museum Print Collection* March 27-May 29. Mexic-Arte Museum. www.mexic-artemuseum.org 512/200-7278

AUSTIN: Moto GP April 8-10. Circuit of the Americas. www.circuitofthe americas.com

AUSTIN: Spring Plant Sale and Gardening Festival April 8-10. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. www.wildflower.org

AUSTIN: Old Settler's Music Festival April 14-17. Salt Lick Pavilion and Camp Ben McCulloch. www.oldsettlersmusicfest.org 512/478-0578

AUSTIN: Moontower Comedy and Oddity Festival April 20-23. Various venues. www.moontowercomedyfest.com 512/474-1221

AUSTIN: *Journey Into Big Bend* April 22-September 18. Bullock Museum. www.thestoryoftexas.com

AUSTIN: Louisiana Swamp Thing and Crawfish Festival April 23. *Austin American-Statesman* Lot. www.roadwayevents.com 512/441-9016

AUSTIN: Levitation Fest April 29-May 1. Carson Creek Ranch. www.levitation-austin.com

AUSTIN: Lone Star Rattlesnake Days April 30-May 1. Travis County Exposition Center. www.lonestarrattlesnakedays.org 512/837-6253

BANDERA: Thunder in the Hills March 31-April 3. Mansfield Park. www.bikerralliesoftexas.com 936/776-1699

BANDERA: Mayhem on the Medina April 9-10. Bandera City Park. www.mayhemonthemedina.com 830/796-4447

BOERNE: Boerne Market Days April 9-10. Main Plaza. www.visitboerne.org 210/844-8193

BOERNE: Boerne Parade of Artists April 9-10. Various Galleries. www.visitboerne.org

BOERNE: Second Saturday Art and Wine April 9. Downtown. www.visitboerne.org

BOERNE: Texas Corvette Association 24th Annual Open Car Show April 16. Downtown. www.visitboerne.org 210/493-5964

BRADY: McCulloch County Early Days April 9. Richards Park. www.mchc1.com 325/597-4123

BURNET: Bluebonnet Festival April 8-10. Downtown. www.burnetchamber.org 512/756-4297

BURNET: Bluebonnet Airshow April 23. Burnet Municipal Airport. www.bluebonnetairshow.com 512/756-2226

COMFORT: Comfort Village Spring Antiques Show April 30-May 1. Comfort Park. www.texasantiqueshows.com 830/329-2870

FREDERICKSBURG: First Friday Art Walk April 1. Various locations. www.ffawf.com 830/997-6523

FREDERICKSBURG: Texas Hill Country Wine and Wildflower Trail April 1-17. Various locations. www.texaswinetrail.com 872/216-9463

FREDERICKSBURG: Historic Country Schools Open House Tour April 2. Various locations. www.historicschools.org 830/997-5116

FREDERICKSBURG: Wildflower Celebration at Wildseed Farms April 2-17. www.wildseedfarms.com 830/990-8080

FREDERICKSBURG: Fredericksburg Trade Days April 15-17. Trade Days at Sunday Farms. www.fbgtradedays.com 210/846-4094

FREDERICKSBURG: Fort Martin Scott Days April 22-23. www.ftmartinscott.org 830/217-3200

FREDERICKSBURG: Hill Country Film Festival April 28-May 1. Fritztown Cinema. www.hillcountryff.com 512/838-6828

FREDERICKSBURG: Wings Over the Hills Nature Festival April 29-May 1. Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park. www.wingstx.org 830/990-9823

GEORGETOWN: Georgetown Quilt and Stitchery Show April 1-2. Georgetown Community Center. www.handcraftsunlimited.com 512/658-6973

GEORGETOWN: Red Poppy Festival April 22-24. Georgetown Square. www.RedPoppyFestival.com 800/436-8696

JOHNSON CITY: Last Saturday Art Walk April 30. Texcetera. www.texcetera.net 830/868-2419

JONESTOWN: Cajun Cook-Off April 2. Jones Brothers Park. www.lagovista.org 512/267-7952

JUNCTION: Outdoor Women Gone Wild April 16. South Llano River State Park. www.junctiontexas.com 325/446-3190

KERRVILLE: Kerr Arts and Cultural Center Exhibits March 31-April 24. www.kacckerrville.com 830/895-2911

KERRVILLE: Texas Packard Meet April 1-3. Inn of the Hills Resort. www.texaspackardmeet.com 210/347-1064

KERRVILLE: Dog Agility Show April 1-3. Kerr County Hill Country Youth Event Center. www.heartoftexas dogsports.com

KERRVILLE: Regional Cub Scout Pinewood Derby April 2. Salvation Army Kroc Center. www.pinewoodderby.org 713/724-4751

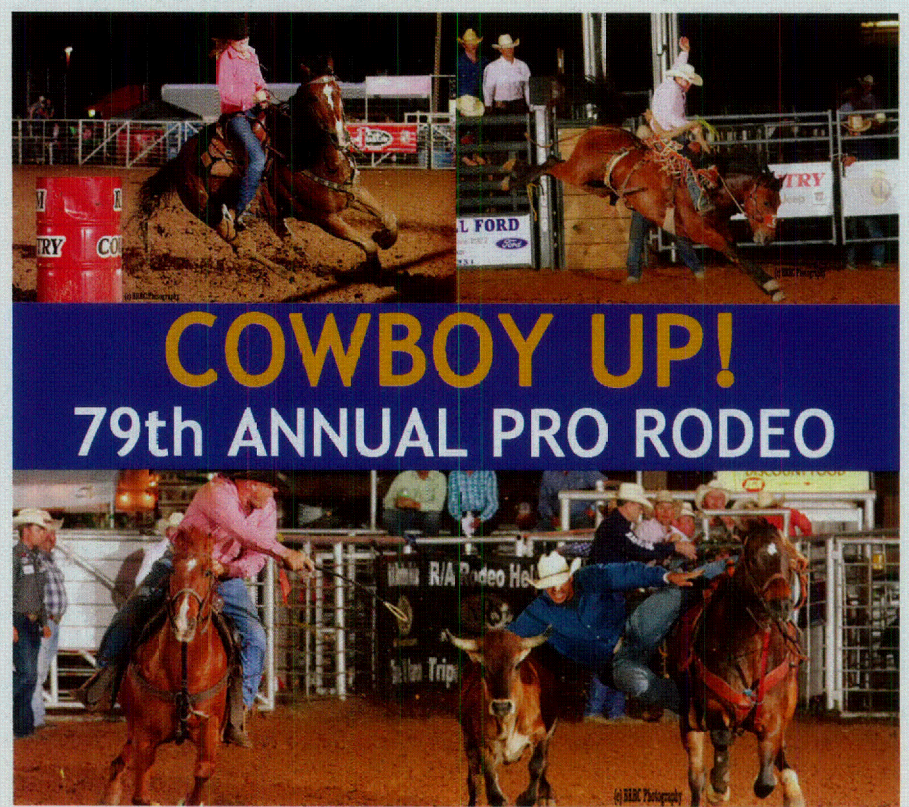
KERRVILLE: Texas Heritage Music *Coffee House Series* April 5. Schreiner University. www.texasheritagemusic.org 830/792-1945

KERRVILLE: Kerr County Market Days April 23. Kerr County Courthouse. www.kerrmarketdays.org 830/895-7524

LAMPASAS: Bloomin' Fest April 2. Downtown. www.lampasaschamber.org 512/556-5172

LAMPASAS: Lampasas Hillacious Bike Tour April 9. www.lampasashillaciousbiketour.com 512/556-5172

LAMPASAS: Citywide Garage Sale April 30. Various locations. 512/556-5434



MARBLE FALLS: Balcones Songbird Festival April 22-24. Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. www.friendsofbalcones.org 512/339-9432

NEW BRAUNFELS: *Lindheimer's Texas* September 1-May 1. The Sophienburg Museum and Archives. 830/629-1572

NEW BRAUNFELS: Folkfest April 9. Heritage Village. www.nbheritagevillage.com 830/625-2385

NEW BRAUNFELS: Kindermasken Parade April 9. Downtown. www.nbheritagevillage.com 830/625-2385

NEW BRAUNFELS: Train Show April 9-10. New Braunfels Civic Center. www.newbraunfelsrailroad museum.org/trainshow.htm

SAN MARCOS: *Rodrigo Moya: Photography and Conscience / Fotografía y conciencia* Through July 3. www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu 512/245-2907

SAN MARCOS: *Animals Among Us: Photographs from the Permanent Collection* Through May 13. www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu 512/245-2907

SAN MARCOS: *Places in the Heart: Texas Cinescapes* Through July 3. www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu 512/245-2907

SAN MARCOS: Swing on the Square April 1-3. Downtown. www.SMTXswingfest.com 512/393-8430

SAN MARCOS: Youthfest April 2. www.gsmyc.org/youthfest.html 512/754-0500

STONEWALL: LBJ 100 Bicycle Ride April 2. LBJ National Historical Park. www.nps.gov/lyjo 830/868-7128

STONEWALL: Spring Shindig April 23. LBJ National Historic Park. www.lbjmuseum.com

STONEWALL: Lavender Festival at Becker Vineyards April 30-May 1. www.beckervineyards.com 830/644-2681

UVALDE: Four Square Friday April 8. Downtown. www.visituvalde.com 830/278-4115

WIMBERLEY: Blue Hole Concerts April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. Blue Hole Regional Park. www.blueholeregionalpark.com 512/660-9111

WIMBERLEY: Market Days April 2. Lions Field. www.shopmarketdays.com 512/847-2201

WIMBERLEY: Second Saturday Gallery Trail April 9. Wimberley Square. www.facebook.com/SecondSaturdayGalleryTrail 713/732-1543

WIMBERLEY: Butterfly Festival April 16. EmilyAnn Theatre and Gardens. www.emilyann.org 512/847-6969

WIMBERLEY: Arts Fest April 23-24. Blue Hole Regional Park. www.wimberleyartsfest.com 512/826-4286

PANHANDLE PLAINS

ABILENE: Outlaws and Legends Music Fest April 1-2. Back Porch of Texas. www.outlawsandlegends.com 325/518-9977

ABILENE: Cajun Festival April 9. Taylor County Expo Center. 325/677-1444

ABILENE: Key City Blues Festival April 29-30. Frontier Texas! 325/677-1841

ABILENE: ArtWalk April 14. Downtown. 325/677-8389

ALBANY: *Robert Langham: Blackforest Bestiary Exhibition* Through May 14. Old Jail Art Center. www.theojac.org 325/762-2269

ALBANY: *Lonesome Dove: Highlights of The Wittliff Collections* April 3-July 23. Old Jail Art Center. www.theojac.org 325/762-2269

AMARILLO: *The Bold and Beautiful; Trailblazing Women of the American Quarter Horse* Through July 30. American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum. www.aqha.com/museum 806/378-4718

AMARILLO: First Friday Art Walk April 1. The Galleries at Sunset Center. www.amarilloartists.com 806/353-5700

ANDREWS: Wild, Wild West Fest April 28-May 1. ACE Arena. www.andrewstx.com 432/523-2695

BUFFALO GAP: Buffalo Gap Wine and Food Summit April 22-24. Perini Ranch,. www.buffalogapsummit.com 800/367-1721

BUFFALO GAP: Chautauqua Learning Series April 9. Buffalo Gap Historic Village. 325/572-3365

CANYON: *Jose Arpa, A Spanish Painter in Texas* April 9-September 5. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum. www.panhandleplains.org

COLEMAN: Petticoats on the Prairie Vintage Market April 15-16. Bill Franklin Center/Goree Expo. www.colemantexas.org 325/242-3356

DALHART: Eta Upsilon Golf Tournament April 23. Twisted Elms Golf Club. 806/674-0194

EASTLAND: Rip's Ribs Cook Off April 9. Downtown. www.ripsribscookoff.com 254/629-2332

LUBBOCK: Ranch Day April 9. National Ranching Heritage Center. www.nrhc.ttu.edu 806/742-0498

SAN ANGELO: Fort Concho Speakers Series April 6, 13, 20, 27. Fort Concho National Historic Landmark. www.fortconcho.com 325/657-4441

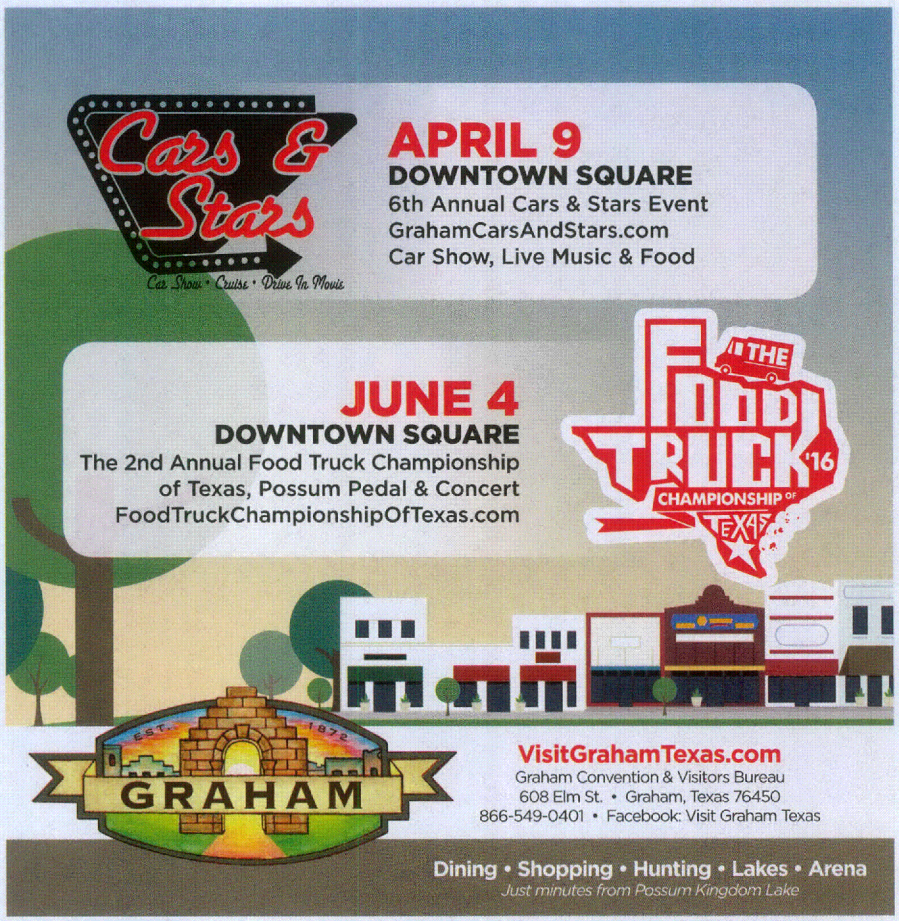
SAN ANGELO: Family Day: Art and Science April 9. San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts. www.samfa.org 325/653-3333

SAN ANGELO: San Angelo National Ceramic Competition April 15-June 26. San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts. www.samfa.org 325/653-3333

SAN ANGELO: Cactus Market Days April 16. Cactus Hotel Parking Lot. 325/949-6200

SAN ANGELO: Gallery Talk with Roger Allen April 18. San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts. www.samfa.org 325/653-3333

SAN ANGELO: Downtown Art Walk April 21. Various locations. www.samfa.org 325/653-3333



SAN ANGELO: Regional Cavalry Competition April 21-23. Fort Concho National Historic Landmark. www.fortconcho.com 325/234-0316

SAN ANGELO: Fort Concho Frontier Day April 23. Fort Concho National Historic landmark. www.fortconcho.com 325/234-0316

SAN ANGELO: San Angelo Symphony Presents *A Tale As Old As Time* April 23. Angelo State University Junell Center. www.sanangelosymphony.org 325/658-5877

SAN ANGELO: Play It Again Concert April 24. San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts. www.samfa.org 325/653-3333

SAN ANGELO: Salmon Sculpture Competition Through August 7. Sunken Garden Park. www.samfa.org 325/653-3333

VERNON: Roy Orbison Birthday Picnic and Music Festival April 23. Downtown Main Street District. www.GoVernon.com 940/552-2581

WICHITA FALLS: Red River Wine and Beer Festival April 16. J.S. Bridwell Ag Center. www.redriverwinefestival.com 940/733-0936 or 940/781-5570

WICHITA FALLS: Wichita Falls PRCA Rodeo April 22-23. J.S. Bridwell Ag Center. www.facebook.com/WFPRCA/timeline 940/867-8022

PINEY WOODS

CONROE: Texas Wildlife and Woodland Expo and Spring Fling April 2. LSC-Montgomery. www.expo.tamu.edu

GLADEWATER: East Texas Gusher Days April 16. Downtown. 903/845-5501

HUNTSVILLE: Walker County Fair and Rodeo April 1-9. Walker County Fairgrounds. www.walkercountyfair.com 936/291-8763

HUNTSVILLE: Herb Festival at the Wynne Home April 9. Wynne Home Arts Center. www.texasthymeunit.org 936/891-5024

JEFFERSON: Citywide Rummage Sale April 1-3. Various locations. www.jefferson-texas.com 903/665-2672

JEFFERSON: Jefferson Flea Market April 1-3, 15-16. www.jeffersonfleamarket.net 903/431-0043

JEFFERSON: History, Haunts and Legends April 2. Jefferson Transportation and Visitor Center. www.jeffersonghostwalk.com 902/665-6289

JEFFERSON: Diamond Don's 14th Annual AHRMA Riverport National Vintage Motocross April 7-10. Diamond Don's RV Park. www.diamonddon.com 866/398-2038

JEFFERSON: Outlaw Nationals Classic Car Show April 15-17. Downtown. 903/665-7121

JEFFERSON: Jefferson Historical Pilgrimage April 28-May 1. Various venues. www.jefferson-texas.com/events 903/665-3733

LUFKIN: Angelina Benefit Rodeo April 20-23. George H. Henderson Jr. Exposition Center. www.angelinabenefitrodeo.com 936/637-3976

MAGNOLIA: Magnolia Showdown Barbecue Cook-Off April 1-2. Unity Park. www.magnoliatexas.org 281/356-1488

MAGNOLIA: Depot Day April 16. Historic Magnolia Depot. www.magnoliatxhistoricalsociety.com 281/356-8514 or 281/259-6600

MONTGOMERY: Texas Wildlife and Woodland Expo April 2. Lone Star College-Montgomery. www.lonestar.edu/montgomery

PALESTINE: Dogwood Trails Celebration March 18-20, 25-27, April 1-3. Various locations. www.visitpalestine.com 903/723-3014

PALESTINE: Railfan Photographer's Special April 30-May 1. Texas State Railroad Palestine Depot. www.texasstaterr.com 877/726-7245

SAN AUGUSTINE: San Augustine Garden Club Gala Garden Fair April 8-9. Historic Angus Museum Theater. 936/675-1072

TEXARKANA: Bankhead Highway Centennial Parade Across Texas April 20-24. Various locations. www.clubs.hemmings.com/americanindependentautos/ 903/886-7664

TYLER: *Chihuly: Works from Texas Collections* Through May 15. Tyler Museum of Art. www.tylermuseum.org 903/595-1001

TYLER: Azalea and Spring Flower Trail March 25-April 10. Various locations. www.visittyler.com 903/592-1661

TYLER: Tyler State Park Dogwood Days Driving and Walking Tour March 25-April 10. www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/tyler 903/597-5338

TYLER: ETSO Piano Festival April 1-2. Liberty Theatre. www.etso.org 903/526-3876

TYLER: Camp Ford Living History April 2. 903/522-1904

TYLER: Texas Rose Dressage Classic April 8-10. Texas Rose Horse Park. www.texasrosehorsepark.com 903/882-8696

TYLER: *Spirits of Oakwood* April 9. Oakwood Cemetery. 903/593-4642

TYLER: Azalea Arts-and-Crafts Fair April 9-10. Bergfeld Park. www.tylerparksandrec.com 903/531-1214

TYLER: Funky Junk Roundup April 16. Harvey Convention Center. www.montagefestivals.com 405/401-7193

TYLER: Taste of Tyler April 19. Harvey Hall Convention Center. www.tasteoftyler.com 903/534-9761

WECHES: Mission Tejas State Park Folk Festival April 23. 936/687-2394

WOODVILLE: Tyler County Dogwood Festival April 2. Downtown. www.tylercounty dogwoodfestival.org 409/283-2632

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

ARLINGTON: WWE Wrestlemania 32 April 3. AT&T Stadium. www.stadium.dallascowboys.com 817/892-4000

ARLINGTON: Festival of Quilts Show April 22-23. Bob Duncan Community Center. www.qgoa.org 682/518-3074

BASTROP: Yesterfest April 29-30. Downtown. www.bastropyesterfest.org

BELTON: Tour of The Gault Site April 2. The Bell County Museum. www.bellcountymuseum.org 254/933-5243

BELTON: *Grand Ole Opry-Classics* April 13-August 6. The Bell County Museum. www.bellcountymuseum.org 254/933-5243

BELTON: Discovery Day with Charley Chisholm April 16. The Bell County Museum. www.bellcountymuseum.org 254/933-5243

BONHAM: Red River Art, Wine, and Music Fest April 16. Creative Arts Center. www.creativeartscenter.us 903/640-2196

BRENHAM: Heritage Society Spring Homes Tour April 10. Giddings Stone Mansion. www.giddingsstonemansion.com 979/836-1690

BRYAN: Downtown Street and Art Fair April 9. www.downtownbryan.com 979/822-4920

BRYAN: Wine and Roses April 23. Messina Hof Winery and Resort. www.messinahof.com/wineandroses 800/736-9463 ext. 234

BURTON: La Bahia Antique Show March 25-April 2. La Bahia Hall. www.labahiaantiques.com 979/289-2684

CHAPPELL HILL: Official Bluebonnet Festival of Texas April 9-10. Downtown. www.chappellhillmuseum.org 979/836-6033

CLEBURNE/GRANDVIEW: Antique Alley Texas and 30 Miles of Shopping April 15-17. Also in Alvarado, Maypearl, Sand Flat, and Venus. www.AntiqueAlleyTexas.com 817/240-4948

CLEBURNE: Cowboys for Kids PBR Bull Riding April 29-30. Johnson County Sheriff's Posse Grounds. www.cowboysforkids-jc.org 817/558-1599

CLEBURNE: SpringFest April 30. Hulen Park. www.cleburnedowntownassociation.com 817/645-2455

CLIFTON: Wildflower Art Show March 13-April 24. Bosque Museum. www.bosquemuseum.org 254/675-3845

CLIFTON: Big Event April 9. Bosque Arts Center. www.BosqueArtsCenter.org 254/675-3724

CLIFTON: Bosque Countywide Garage Sale April 15-16. Various locations. www.bosque.agrilife.org 254/435-2331

COLLEGE STATION: Living History Weekend April 1-2. Museum of the American G.I. www.americangimuseum.org 979/446-6888

COLLEGE STATION: *You are Here: Texas Photographers respond to the Texas Landscape* April 21-June 2. Wright Gallery at the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University. www.arch.tamu.edu/inside/services/wright-gallery

CORSICANA: Derrick Days Pro Rodeo April 29-30. Navarro County Exposition Center. www.derrickdays.com 903/654-1653

CORSICANA: Derrick Days April 30. Downtown. www.derrickdays.com 903/654-4851

DALLAS: *Spirit and Matter: Masterpieces from the Keir Collection of Islamic Art* Through July 31. Dallas Museum of Art. www.DMA.org

DALLAS: *Anne Frank: A History for Today* Through May 31. Dallas Holocaust Museum/Center for Education and Tolerance. www.dallasholocaustmuseum.org 214/741-7500

DALLAS: *Path to the Presidency* March 1-October 9. George W. Bush Presidential Center. www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu 214/346-1650

DALLAS: *Dominic Smith: Dutch Masters and Deceit* April 5. Horchow Auditorium at the Dallas Museum of Art. www.dma.org 214/922-1200

DALLAS: National Geographic Speaker Series: Charlie Hamilton James April 7. Perot Museum of Nature and Science. www.perotmuseum.org 214/428-5555

DALLAS: *Padma Lakshmi: Food and Family* April 8. First United Methodist Church of Dallas. www.dma.org 214/922-1200

DALLAS: Turtle Creek Association Tour of Homes April 10. Turtle Creek Association. www.turtlecreekassociation.org 214/526-2800

DALLAS: *Eye of the Collector* April 15-September 5. Perot Museum of Nature and Science. www.perotmuseum.org

DALLAS: *Skip Hollandsworth: The Hunt for America's First Serial Killer* April 19. Horchow Auditorium at the Dallas Museum of Art. www.dma.org 214/922-1200

DALLAS: David Sedaris April 27-29. Dallas City Performance Hall. www.attpac.org

DALLAS: *Curtis Sittenfeld: Jane Austen Remixed* April 30. Dallas Public Library Auditorium. www.dma.org 214/922-1200

DECATUR: Glitzy Girls Trailer Park April 9. Decatur Square. 940/627-3177

DENTON: *Materials Hard and Soft* Through April 1. Denton Center for Visual Arts. www.dentonarts.com 940/382-2787

DENTON: North Texas Horse Country Tour April 2. Historical Park of Denton County. www.horsecountrytours.com 940/382-7895

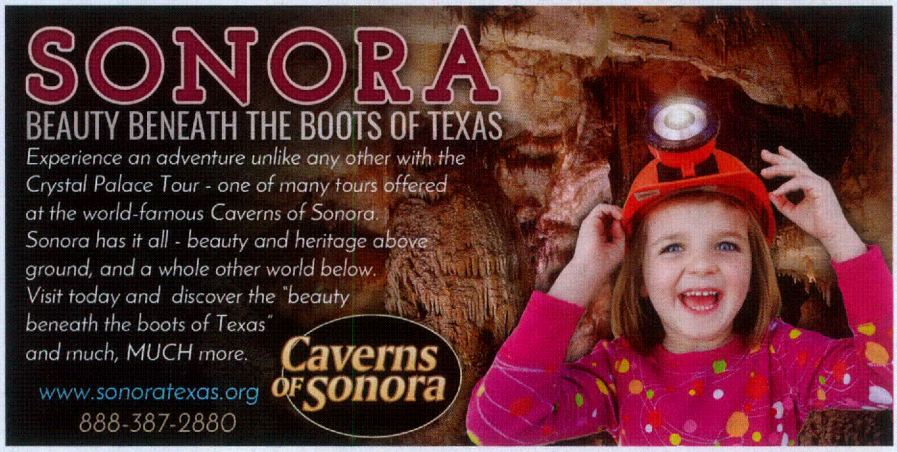
DENTON: Twilight Tunes April 28. Denton Courthouse-on-the-Square lawn. www.dentonmainstreet.org 940/367-7321

DENTON: Denton Arts and Jazz Festival April 29-May 1. Quakertown Park. www.dentonjazzfest.com 940/565-0931

ELGIN: Flea Market Days April 2. Elgin Memorial Park. 512/285-4025

ELGIN: Music in the Park Series April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. Veterans' Memorial Park. www.elgintx.com 512/285-6190

ELGIN: Sip, Shop and Stroll April 14. Downtown. www.elgintx.com 512/285-5721



ENNIS: Bluebonnet Trails Festival April 15-17. Downtown. www.visitennis.org 972/878-4748

FLATONIA: Flatonia Railroad Pavilion Party April 2. Railroad Photo Pavilion at the Crossroads. www.sidetracktommy.com 979/743-5366

FLATONIA: Spring Market Day with the Texas Independence Relay Exchange Zone April 2. Downtown. www.flatoniachamber.com

FLATONIA: Crawfest April 16. Flatonia American Legion Hall. www.flatoniachamber.com

FORT WORTH: *Texas Folk Art* Through September 19. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. www.cartermuseum.org 817/738-1933

FORT WORTH: *FOCUS: Glenn Kaino* Through April 17. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. www.themodern.org

FORT WORTH: *American Epics: Thomas Hart Benton and Hollywood* Through May 1. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. www.cartermuseum.org

FORT WORTH: *Discarded: Photographs by Anthony Hernandez* March 5-August 7. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. www.cartermuseum.org

FORT WORTH: NCHA Superstakes Classic March 24-April 16. Will Rogers Memorial Center. www,nchacutting.com 817/244-6188

FORT WORTH: Fort Worth Food and Wine Festival March 31-April 3. Sundance Square. www.fwfwf.com 817/336-8791

FORT WORTH: Main Street Fort Worth Art Festival April 14-17. www.mainstreetartsfest.org 817/870-1692

FORT WORTH: *Frank Stella: A Retrospective* April 17-September 4. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. www.themodern.org 817/738-9215

FORT WORTH: Fort Worth Opera Festival April 23-May 8. Various venues. www.fwopera.org 877/396-7372

FORT WORTH: Mayfest April 28-May 1. Trinity Park. www.mayfest.org 817/332-1055

FORT WORTH: *FOCUS: Thomas Demand* April 30-July 17. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. www.themodern.org

FRISCO: Arts in the Square April 2-3. Frisco Square. www.friscosquare.com/AITS

GAINESVILLE: Medal of Honor Parade April 9. Downtown. www.medalofhonorhostcity.com 940/665-2831

GARLAND: Urban Flea April 9. www.resurrecteddesigns.com 469/298-0042

GARLAND: The Marketplace April 16. Downtown. www.themarketplacedfw.com

GARLAND: Wheels of Hope Car Show April 23. Downtown on the Square. www.wheelsofhopegarland.com 469/800-2500

GLEN ROSE: Paluxy River Spring Bluegrass Festival March 31-April 2. Oakdale Park. 254/897-2321

GLEN ROSE: Murder Mystery Dinner and Tour April 16. Fossil Rim Wildlife Center. www.fossilrim.org 254/897-2960

GLEN ROSE: Lone Star Hunter Jumper Show April 21-24. Somervell County Expo Center. 254/897-4509

GONZALES: Dutch Oven Cook-Off April 30. Pioneer Village. 830/857-4102

GRANBURY: Granbury Wine Walk April 29-30. Granbury Square Plaza. www.granburywinewalk.com 682/498-3087

GRAPEVINE: A Day Out with Thomas April 1-3, 8-10. Grapevine Vintage Railroad. www.HistoricTrains.org 866/468-7630

GRAPEVINE: Blessing of the Vines and New Vintage Wine and Gallery Trail April 9. Various locations. www.grapevinetexasusa.com 817/410-3185

GRAPEVINE: ChocolateFest April 15-16. Grapevine Convention Center. www.ChocolateFestGrapevine.org 817/410-3185

GRAPEVINE: Spring Into Nash Farm April 16. www.NashFarm.org 817/410-3185

HALLETTSVILLE: Texas State Championship Fiddler's Frolics April 21-24. Hallettsville KC Hall. www.kchall.com

HAMILTON: Spring Fling April 9. Hamilton High School. 254/386-8396

INDEPENDENCE: Coles Homes Tours April 2-3, 9-10. Coles Homes. www.independencetx.com 979/251-9227

LEWISVILLE: Colo-palooza: A Celebration of Spring April 9. Old Town Lewisville. www.cityoflewisville.com 972/219-3400

MCDADE: Sherwood Forest Faire Through April 3. Old Potato Road. www.sherwoodforestfaire.com 512/222-6680

MCKINNEY: Arts in Bloom April 9. Downtown. www.DowntownMcKinney.com 972/547-2660

MCKINNEY: Second Saturday Bird Walk April 9. Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary. www.HeardMuseum.org 972/562-5566

MCKINNEY: Old Red Lumberyard April 15-16. Flour Mill District. www.visitmckinney.com 214/544-1407

MCKINNEY: Second Saturday on the Downtown Square April 9. www.downtownmckinney.com 972/547-2660

MCKINNEY: Third Monday Trade Days April 15-17.

www.tmtd.com 972/562-5466

MESQUITE: Mesquite Creative Artists Association Exhibit April 2-30. Mesquite Arts Center Main Gallery. www.mesquiteartscenter.org 972/216-6444

MESQUITE: Mesquite Rodeo Parade April 2. Downtown. www.realtexasflavor.com 972/204-4925

MESQUITE: Mesquite Outdoor Cover Band Series April 7, 14, 21, 28. Mesquite Arts Center North Lawn.

www.mesquiteartscenter.org
972/216-6444

MESQUITE:
Florence Ranch
Homestead Tours
April 9.
www.historicmesquite.org
972/216-6468

MESQUITE:
Opal Lawrence
Historical Park Tours
April 23.
www.historicmesquite.org
972/216-6468

MOUNT VERNON:
Bankhead Highway
Centennial Celebration
April 22-23.
Bankhead Highway. www.
mountvernonmainstreet.com
903/537-4070

PLANO: *When Did You Last See Your Trousers?*
March 31-April 23.
Rover Dramawerks Theatre.
www.roverdramawerks.com

PLANTERSVILLE:
St. Mary's Quilt Show
April 29-30.
St. Mary Catholic Church.
www.stmarysquiltshow.com

ROUND TOP:
Round Top-Warrenton
Spring Antique Show
March 18-April 3.
FM 237 between
US 290 and Texas 71.
www.roundtop.org
979/249-4042

SALADO: Pub Crawl
April 1. Various locations.
www.salado.com
254/947-5040

SALADO: *Edgy*
Live Art Competition
April 2.
Main Street Salado.
www.salado.com
254/947-5040

SALADO: Texas Wine
and Rogue Art Fest
April 2-3.
Salado Winery
and Salado Wine Seller.
www.saladowinefestival.com
254/947-8011

SALADO: Wildflower Art
and Arts-and-Crafts Show
April 2-3. Main Street.
www.salado.com
254/947-4050

SALADO: Ultra520KTexas
Ultra Endurance Triathlon
April 29-May 1.
Various venues. www.salado.
com 254/947-5040

SCHULENBURG:
Schulenburg Sausagefest
April 2. Downtown. www.
schulenburgsausagefest.com
979/743-4514 or
866/504-5294

SEALY: Spring Picnic
April 8-9. Liedertafel. www.
sealyhistoricalsociety.org
832/492-4244

SEGUIN: Moonlight and
Roses April 8.
Memorial Rose Garden/
Walnut Springs Park.
www.visitseguin.com
830/401-2475

SEGUIN: The Heritage
Museum Anniversary
April 8. Heritage Museum.
www.theheritagemuseum.
org 830/379-6717

SEGUIN: Trade Days/
Earth Day April 30.
Central Park.
www.visitseguin.com
830/401-2475

SHERMAN: Earth Day
Texoma April 23. Sherman
Municipal Grounds.
www.earthdaytexoma.org
903/821-8198

SMITHVILLE: Citywide
Garage Sale April 2.
Various locations.
www.smithvillechamber.org
512/237-2313

SMITHVILLE: Smithville
Jamboree April 7-10.
Riverbend Park.
www.smithvilletx.org
512/237-2313

SOUTHLAKE: Art in
the Square April 22-24.
Southlake Town Square.
www.artinthesquare.com
817/944-4408

TEMPLE: Bloomin'
Temple Festival
April 29-30. Downtown.
www.discovertemple.com
254/298-5900

WACO: *Tinkertoy: Build Your Imagination* and *The Adventures of Mr. Potato Head* Through May 1.
Mayborn Museum Complex.
www.mayborn museum.com
254/710-1110

WACO: The Texas Food
Truck Showdown
April 2. Heritage Square.
www.wacochamber.com
254/757-5600

WACO: Art on Elm
April 9. Elm Street.
www.artonelmavenue.com
254/752-1647

WARRENTON: The Lone
Star Gallery Trade Days
and Antiques Week
March 19-20, 25-April 2.
The Lone Star Gallery.
www.thelonestargallery.com
512/797-9815

WAXAHACHIE:
Scarborough Renaissance
Festival April 9-May 30.
Scarborough Faire Site.
www.SRFestival.com
972/938-3247

WAXAHACHIE:
Vintage Market Days
April 22-24.
Ellis Co. Expo Center.
www.socentraltexas.
vintagemarketdays.com
918/606-2254

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

BEEVILLE: *Paintings from the Nave*
Through April 30.
Beeville Art Museum.
www.bamtexas.org
361/358-8615

GOLIAD: Goliad Massacre
Reenactment and Living
History Program
April 2-3. Presidio La Bahía.
www.presidiolabahia.org
361/645-3752

LAREDO: Laredo
Northside Market
April 2.
956/763-0138

POTEET: Poteet Strawberry
Festival April 8-10.
Strawberry Festival Grounds.
www.strawberryfestival.com

SAN ANTONIO: *Spurs for Texas: Selections from the Leo Quintanilla Collection*
Through April 3.
South Texas Heritage Center
at the Witte Museum.
www.WitteMuseum.org

SAN ANTONIO: *The Wests of Texas: Cattle Ranching Entrepreneurs*
Through April 3.
South Texas Heritage Center
at the Witte Museum.
www.WitteMuseum.org

SAN ANTONIO:
Collecting in Context
Through April 17.
McNay Art Museum.
www.mcnayart.org
210/824-5368

SAN ANTONIO: *Splendor on the Range: American Indians and the Horse*
March 5-August 21.
Witte Museum.
www.WitteMuseum.org
210/357-1910

SAN ANTONIO:
Pedal Punk April 1.
Majestic Theatre.
www.artssa.org/pedal_punk
210/226-2891

SAN ANTONIO:
Musical Evenings
At San Fernando Cathedral
April 10.
San Fernando Cathedral.
www.facebook.com/events/
1002150689829128
210/464-1534

SAN ANTONIO:
Fiesta San Antonio
April 14-24.
Various venues.
www.fiesta-sa.org
210/227-5191 or
877/723-4378

SAN ANTONIO: Valero
Texas Open April 18-24.
TPC San Antonio.
www.valerotexasopen.com

SAN ANTONIO:
A Night In Old San Antonio
April 19-22. La Villita
Historic Arts Village.
www.niosa.org
210/226-5188

SAN ANTONIO:
The Extraordinary Ordinary: Three Installations
Through April 10.
McNay Art Museum.
www.mcnayart.org
210/824-5368

WESLACO:
Texas Onion Fest
April 2. City Park.
www.weslaco.com/
OnionFest
956/968-2102

WESLACO: Alfresco
Weslaco Music and Art
on the Street April 21.
Historic Downtown.
www.facebook.com/
AlfrescoWeslaco
956/969-0838

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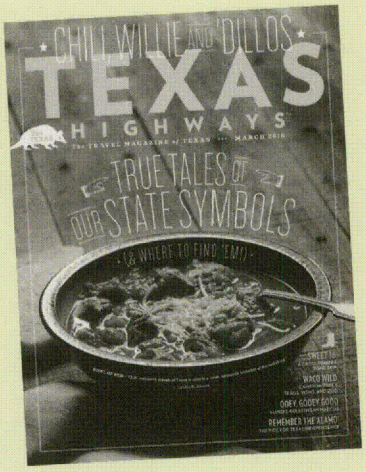

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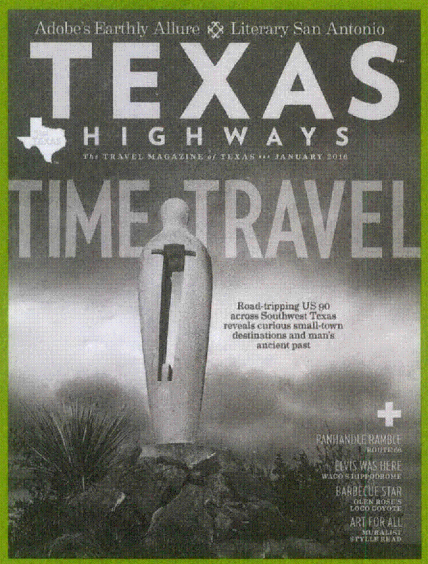

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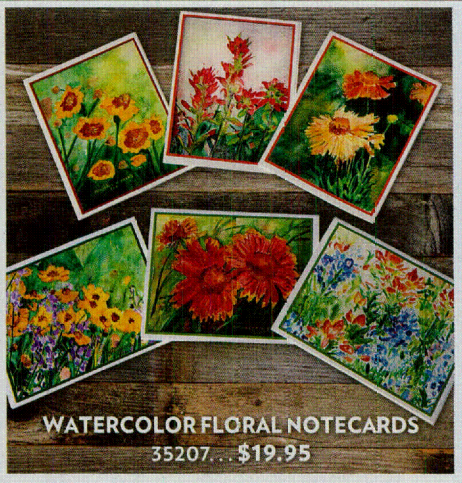

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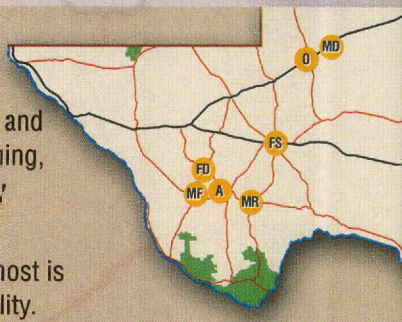
or use the ORDER FORM in this issue.

WEST TEXAS ROAD TRIP

As you explore, you'll find an amazing range of relaxation and adventure, natural beauty and urban culture, fine art, fine dining, small-town charm and big-city amenities...

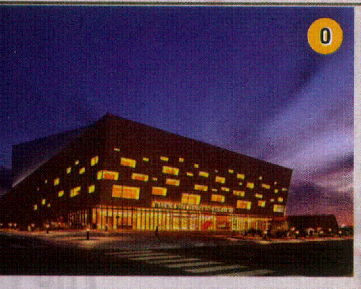
but what you will remember most is the warm, West Texas hospitality.



MD

MIDLAND–Feel the Energy. A great starting point for your trip to West Texas! Midland International Air & Space Port is the closest airport to Big Bend National Park.
visitmidlandtexas.com

Apr 9 - Hops & Props: beer tasting, live music and food among vintage warbirds
May 6-8 - Celebration of the Arts



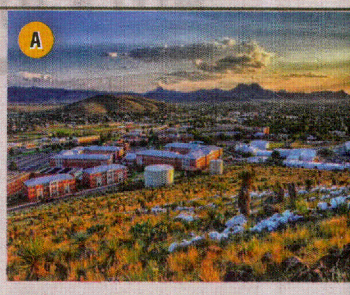
O

ODESSA–Known for breathtaking sunsets, wide-open spaces and warm West Texas hospitality; you'll enjoy shopping, dining, unique cultural attractions and events. Odessa: your gateway to the Big Bend. ***odessacvb.com***

Apr 8 - Odessa Jackalopes Ice Hockey
Apr 25 - Joseph & The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

ALPINE–Natural beauty, unique nightlife and shopping, and a grand array of hotels and guest lodging make this the perfect staging grounds for your West Texas adventure.
visitalpinetx.com

Apr 14-16 - Trappings of Texas Exhibit & Sale
Apr 15-17 - Alpine Gem & Mineral Show



A

FS

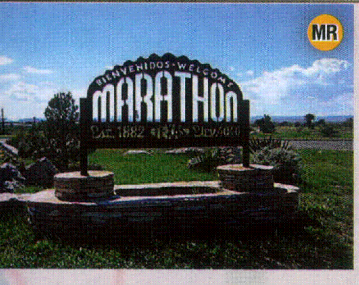
FORT STOCKTON–Lodging, Dining, Entertainment and History. Experience our Visitor Center, Historic Sites, Museum, Fort Grounds, Golf Course, and Unique Shopping, West Texas style. ***historicfortstocktontx.com***

Apr 20-23 - Big Bend Open Road Race
June - Summer off the Patio/Blue Moon Park Concerts

FORT DAVIS–Experience the mile-high climate in the Texas mountains! Award-winning State and National Parks offer excellent nature activities and star gazing under the "Darkest Skies in North America! ***fortdavis.com***

Apr 23 - "Mile High" Chili Cook-Off
May 6-7 - Cinco de Mayo Fiesta & Boxing Tournament

FD



MR

MARATHON–Blessed with friendly people, beautiful surroundings, and a delightful climate, Marathon is a peaceful, serene community under one of the darkest and starriest skies in the country. ***marathontexas.com***

July 2 - Fourth of July Dance & BBQ
July 2-3 - Cowboy & Mustang Chili Cook-Off

MARFA–It defies easy explanation, yet any google search yields thousands of opinions. Marfa is tough to get to–tougher still to explain. But once you arrive, you get it.
visitmarfa.com

Apr 1-10 - David Loren Bass @ Greasewood
Apr 14-16 - Wild Plants of the High Desert Workshop @ El Cosmico

MF

the Daytripper™

WITH **CHET GARNER**

CHET GARNER *is the host of* **The Daytripper®** *travel show on PBS; www.thedaytripper.com.*

Paddlin' With *the Devil*

In the remote reaches of West Texas lies one of the most pristine rivers in the Southwest United States. Surrounded by cacti and rocks, the Devils River snakes through the Chihuahuan Desert like a ribbon of turquoise blue, eventually flowing into Lake Amistad. And for experienced paddlers looking for an off-the-grid adventure, this trip is absolutely heavenly.

7:00 A.M. DAY ONE

My travel companion and I woke up early to rendezvous with **Amistad Expeditions**, the Del Rio outfitter that would provide our kayaks and a shuttle to-and-from our voyage. We loaded into their truck and spent the next hour gaining valuable insight on how to handle venomous snakes, flash floods, roaring rapids, and protective landowners.

10:00 A.M. We entered the 37,000-acre **Devils River State Natural Area**. I was stunned at how blue the river was—the result of natural springs, limestone filtration, and the lack of pollution. We moved our gear to the kayaks and hit the water. Soon, the sounds of civilization faded into the rustling wind and flowing water.

10:30 A.M. Within minutes, we heard a roar emanating from downstream. We hopped out to investigate and discovered **Dolan Falls**, a breathtaking waterfall descending from a 10-foot limestone shelf. To avoid sinking our boats in the first hour of our trip, we portaged them around the falls. However, once our gear was safely tied off below, we hiked back to the top of the falls and plunged into the water–cannonball!

3:30 P.M. After a lunch of pre-packed PBJ sandwiches on a small rock island, we paddled on and arrived at **Three-Tier Rapid** ready to face a "Class III" run with three cascading stages. I scouted the route, then held my breath and paddled with a fury: left, right, and left again. Before I knew it, I was at the bottom in one piece and right-side up. Whew!

4:00 P.M. We stopped to fish, and the water was so clear I could see the smallmouth bass toying with my bait. I did catch one fish, which I happily kissed and released back to its home.

7:00 P.M. In between the paddling, fishing, and goofing off, we didn't notice the sun fading behind the canyon walls. Darkness had fallen as we scrambled to find a spot to camp. To respect private property, paddlers must camp on an island (beware of rising water) or along the river bank below the river gradient boundary. Eventually, we found a spot and pulled out our sleeping bags. I wanted to spend all night gazing at the starry sky, but my weary body fell asleep in seconds.

7:00 A.M. DAY TWO

I woke to the sound of chirping birds and boiling water as my buddy made the morning coffee. No coffee shop will ever come close to the experience of sipping joe at the water's edge while the sun rises over the canyon walls.

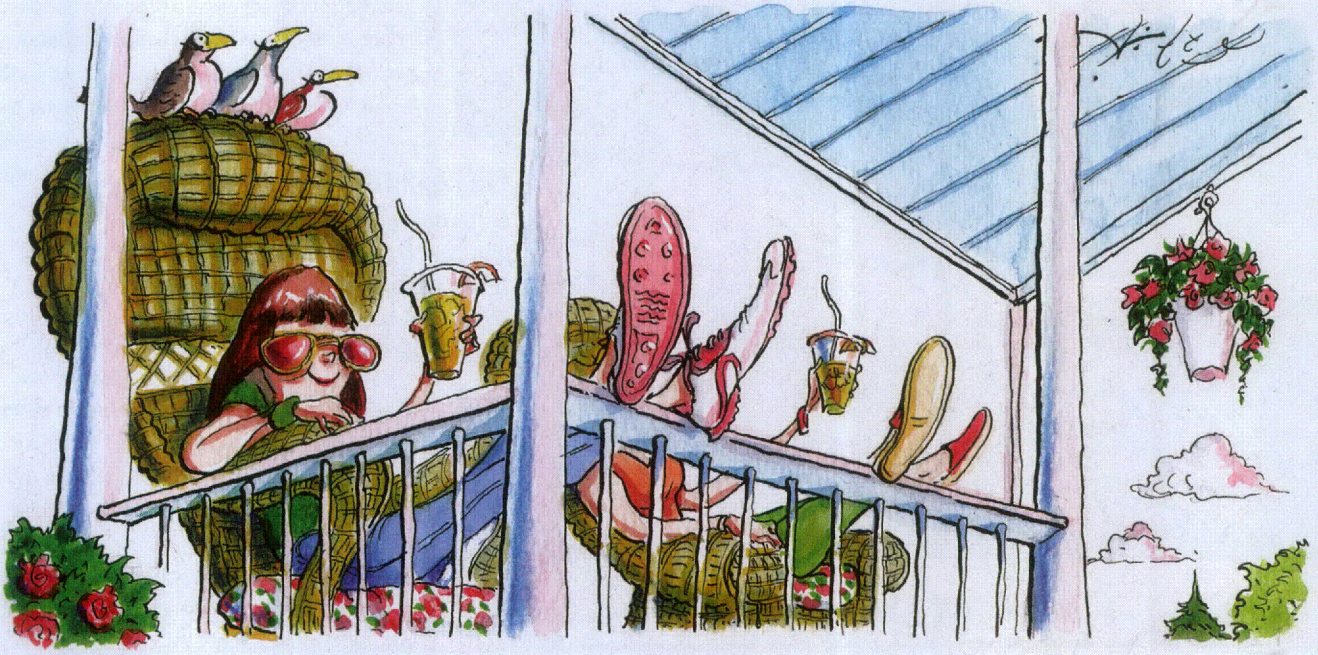
8:30 A.M. We packed up camp and hopped back in our boats for the last six miles of our 15-mile journey. As we meandered downriver, I spotted the cave art of **Turkey Bluff**, estimated to be between 3,000 to 5,000 years old. Through my binoculars (no trespassing!), I could make out a pictograph of a coyote chasing a turkey and couldn't help but think it was an early draft of Wile E. Coyote, destined to never catch his lunch.

2:00 P.M. We finally arrived at the take-out point inside the state natural area's **Dan A. Hughes Unit**. Our outfitter was waiting and ready to take us back to civilization. I hadn't once missed my phone, email, or TV and was tempted to go back to the start and do it all over again.

Throughout our journey, we made sure not to leave any trace of our time on the Devils; however, the river's jaw-dropping beauty and rugged adventure certainly left a lasting impression on us. So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path, I hope to see you on the road. ★

Contact Devils River State Natural Area at 830/395-2133; www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/devils-river. Find more on Amistad Expeditions at www.amistadexpeditions.com.

PHOTO: © Hogaboom Road, Inc.



Porch-*Setting*

SIT A SPELL AND RECHARGE YOUR SPIRIT

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

I HAVE BEEN THINKING A LOT ABOUT PORCH-sitting. Or porch-setting, as Grandmother Tallulah used to call it. It's such a simple pleasure, and central to so many of my travel memories. It's a wonder that, while we cram our vacation plans with to-do lists, what we often look back upon most fondly are the hours spent doing little to nothing. Throw in a comfortable chair with a view, and you've got all you need for a successful stint of porch-sitting.

I am planning a birthday trip for a friend in which I propose porch-sitting as a featured activity. She's a busy woman who loves to travel, detailed itinerary at the ready. But this time I am not letting her plan anything. In fact, I am taking her to a place where there's not a whole lot to do.

I learned the fine art of porch-sitting from my mother. Our summer visits to her family's outpost were a very different holiday for her than for me. Her bliss began with Grandpa Festus lining up ranks of wobbly, wheezy, rusty, and mismatched chairs where she and her siblings would perch for hours.

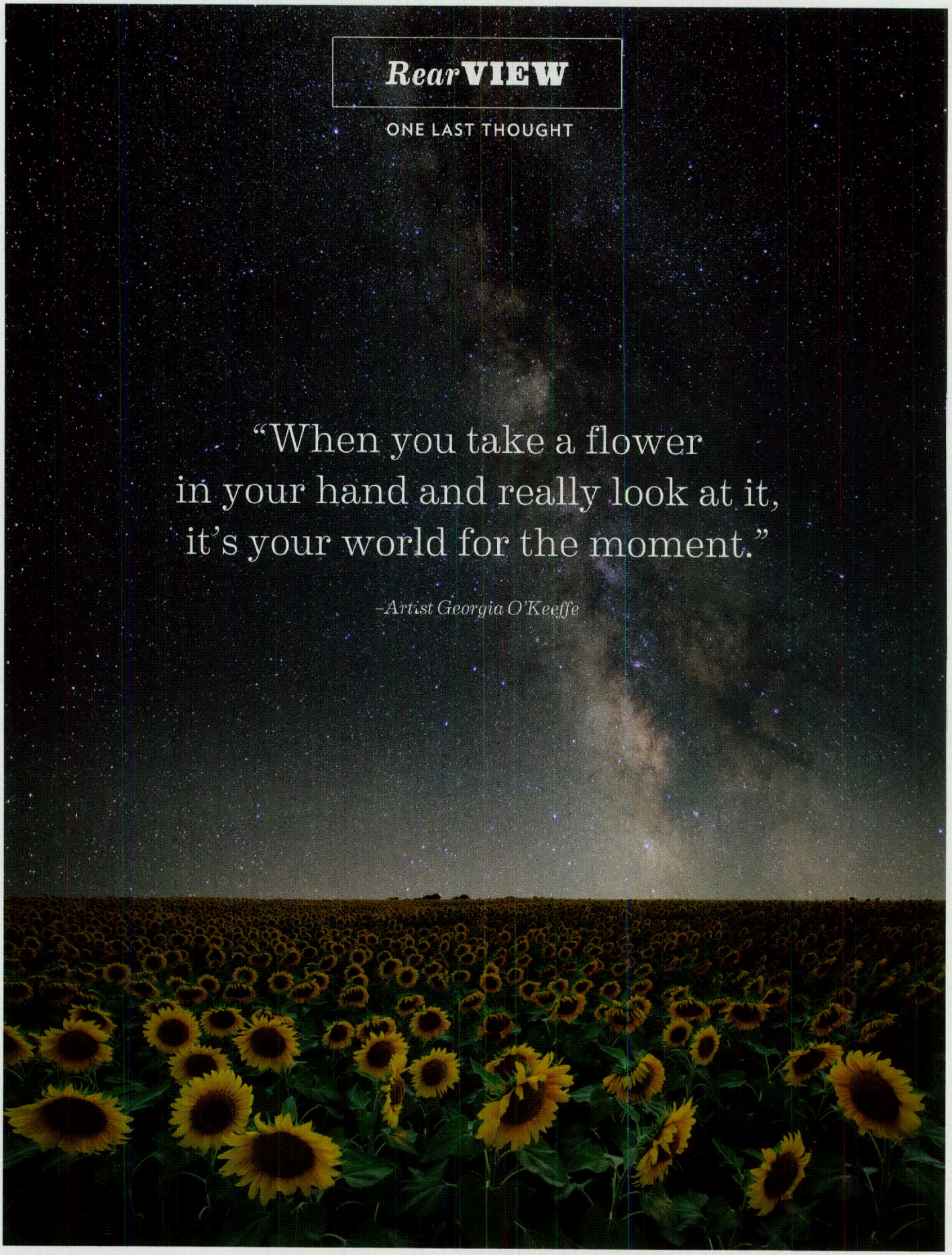
As a child, I felt sorry for the adults. While we ran through those weeks, in hot pursuit of puppies and cousins, the aunts and uncles seemed doomed to do nothing more active than watch us. I understand now that the best porch-sitting has a shared focal point. A view of something less than totally absorbing but interesting enough to inspire an occasional comment is important, be it a change in a cloud pattern, the shimmy of a passing train, or a pack of children bolting about.

What defines world-class porch-sitting is how it opens the air to conversations you wouldn't have elsewhere—or simply convivial silence. Just visiting out-of-town friends, I've witnessed a remarkable change of pace when someone says, "Let's sit on the porch." Whether wine or iced tea is being poured, there's something about sitting in a row, like birds on a fence, that lets the conversation pour out, too. Porch-sitting flank-to-flank is more freeing to opinion and reverie and speculation than even the most communal of dinner tables.

In addition to being a judgment-free zone, a porch provides space to try out new thoughts or revisit old plans. Those are the things I want to give my friend on our trip to Rancho Loma. Sure, we'll explore Coleman, check out the new pizzeria, open a nice bottle of wine—all wrapped up with porch time. ★

There's something about sitting in a row, like birds on a fence, that lets the conversation pour out, too.

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



SUNFLOWER *fields, such as this one in North Texas, may bloom as early as mid-May or early June.*

PHOTO: © Rob Greebon

DAVID ROGERS'
BIG BUGS
March 5 - May 28
Photo Credit: Adam Rodriguez
Shangri La Gardens | shangrilagardens.org
409.670.9113 · Orange, TX