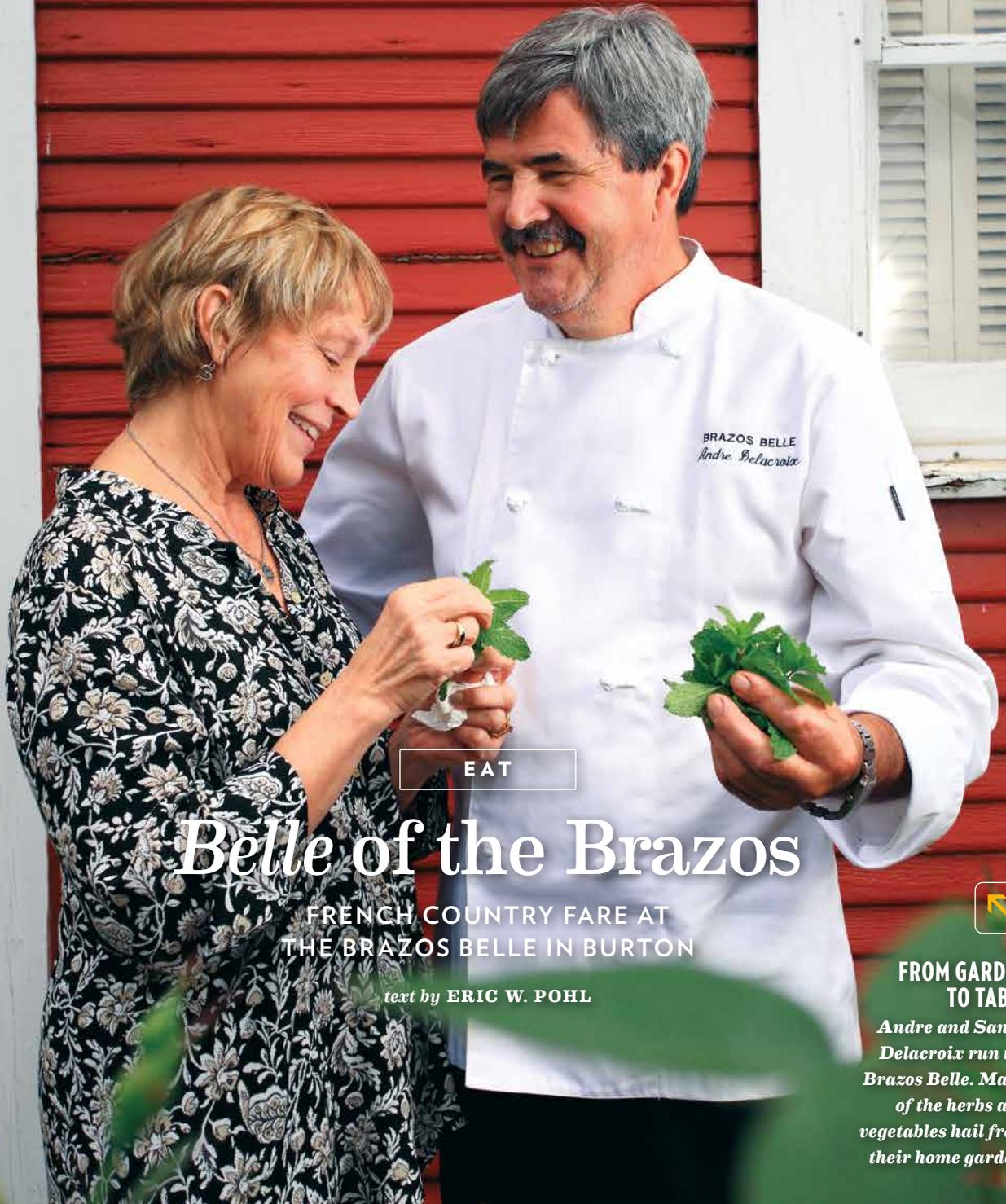


# PLATES

EAT + DRINK + TRAVEL



EAT

## Belle of the Brazos

FRENCH COUNTRY FARE AT  
THE BRAZOS BELLE IN BURTON

text by ERIC W. POHL



**FROM GARDEN  
TO TABLE**

*Andre and Sandy  
Delacroix run the  
Brazos Belle. Many  
of the herbs and  
vegetables hail from  
their home garden.*

The dining room bustles with a mix of groups enjoying conversation, families celebrating special occasions, and couples tucked into intimate corner tables.

**W**HEN YOU THINK OF ROMANTIC French country fare, the Central Texas town of Burton (pop. 302) may not immediately come to mind. Yet this blink-and-you'll-miss-it burg, situated on US 290 amid the pastoral rolling hills of Washington County, is home to the Brazos Belle—a cozy weekend bistro serving French-inspired cuisine in a former 1871 general store.

On a typical evening, the aroma of simmering garlic and savory herbs greets visitors as they walk on creaky pine floors past an antique bar to the dining room, which is furnished with simple wooden tables and ladderback chairs. Framed avian prints, Old-World landscapes, and vintage maps of Texas and France hang on the blue-gray walls, and a glass case filled with antique farming implements speaks to the building's period as a general store. Brass chandeliers bathe the interior in a diffused, romantic glow.



#### BRAZOS BELLE RESTAURANT

is at 600 N. Main St. in Burton. Hours: Fri-Sat 5:30-8:30 and Sun 11:30-1:30. Call 979/289-2677; [www.brazosbelle.com](http://www.brazosbelle.com).

Just after twilight, the Saturday-evening diners start drifting in. Before long, the dining room bustles with a mix of groups enjoying conversation, families celebrating special occasions, and couples tucked into intimate corner tables. In between courses, Chef Andre Delacroix emerges from the kitchen to walk the dining room in his white chef's coat, greeting diners with a warm smile. In fact, the Brazos Belle has a fair contingent of regulars. Andre says that after 20 years, he can recognize many diners simply by their ticket. "I know my customers," he says. "Sometimes when a member of our wait staff brings the order to the kitchen, I know who's there by what they're eating."

Growing up in Tricot, France—a small agrarian village in the Picardy region north of Paris—Andre developed an appreciation for garden-fresh ingredients from an early age. "We had rabbits, chickens, eggs, and vegetables. Everything was from the garden. Everything was fresh," he says.

As a teenager, Andre apprenticed at local restaurants and then later served in the French army as a cook. Next, he worked at the upscale restaurant Georges V in Paris, where he prepped, cured, and marinated meats and made sausages and patés. He later spent five years as a chef with Club Med. "Every six months I moved and met a new team of people," he says. "Different country. Different culture." In the late 1970s, he met his wife, Sandy, and the couple eventually moved to Houston, where Andre served as the chef de cuisine at the Four Seasons hotel.

In 1989, the couple was searching for a weekend home in Burton when they learned that one of the town's oldest downtown buildings—the home of a former restaurant called the Brazos Belle—was for sale. Andre and Sandy had dined there years ago, and as they surveyed the vacant space, inspiration struck. They decided to buy it, gradually fix it up, keep the nostalgic name, and open their own restaurant.

In 1993, all that hard work paid off,



*Baron d'Agneau,*  
grilled lamb loin with herbs and Dijon mustard

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and they reopened the Brazos Belle.

Colored by the culinary traditions of his childhood, Chef Andre employs classic French techniques, but he emphasizes lighter ingredients than the heavy cream and butter some people associate with French fare. For example, he coaxes lush flavors with herbs and red wine. He hand-selects his vegetables every week from local and Houston-area markets, and he harvests herbs and seasonal vegetables from his home garden in Burton. His staff cooks beef bones for up to 36 hours to make a base for sauces and soups. "It's a lot of labor, but it's worth it," Andre says.

The Brazos Belle's menu features a small but carefully chosen medley of beef, pork, fish, and chicken selections, along with a wine list with choices from Oregon, California, Australia, and Europe. Dining highlights include French comfort classics like duck-and-sausage

**Colored by the culinary traditions of his childhood, Chef Andre employs classic French techniques, but he emphasizes lighter ingredients than the heavy cream and butter some people associate with French fare.**

cassoulet and lighter choices such as garlic chicken and lemongrass salmon with tomatoes and capers.

Seated at a romantic window table on a recent visit, my wife, Beth, and I started our meal with a basket of fresh bread, a crisp salad with house vinaigrette, and the paté maison—a savory country paté served with mustard, cornichons, and toast points. For our main courses, I opted for the steak *au*

*poivre vert*, a perfectly cooked beef filet topped with a sauce punctuated by whole green peppercorns and paired with roasted vegetables and potatoes. Beth set her sights on the *baron d'agneau*, a tender grilled lamb loin with a savory crust of herbs and Dijon mustard, rounded off with seasoned rice and baked tomatoes topped with bread-crumbs and Parmesan cheese.

For dessert, we shared the chocolate mousse, whose sweetness was complemented by a tangy layer of orange glaze. Reveling in each spoonful, we pretended to be civil as we insisted the other take the last bite. ★



#### FIND MORE ONLINE

Information on lodging and attractions in Burton at [texashighways.com/eat](http://texashighways.com/eat).



Six Ping Bakery

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Pints in the Pines  
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Sunday, November 8



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## One-Stop Chinatown

EXPLORING HOUSTON'S DUN HUANG PLAZA

text by **Mai Pham**

**I**T TAKES A SENSE OF ADVENTURE, AS WELL as an adventurous palate, to explore ethnic dining areas as vast and sprawling as Houston's Chinatown. Unlike Chinatowns in New York or San Francisco, which span several, walkable blocks, Houston's Chinatown—which migrated from cramped and expensive midtown and downtown locations in the mid-1980s—now encompasses an eight-mile stretch along Bellaire Boulevard on the southwest side of Houston.

For those without a personal guide, venturing into this area—where signage is usually in a language other than English—is not only daunting but confusing. That's where

**In this one plaza alone, approximately 30 restaurants offer everything from Chinese to Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese, Malaysian, and Cantonese fare.**

Dun Huang Plaza, located at 9889 Bellaire Boulevard less than a block east of the Sam Houston Tollway (Beltway 8), comes in.

One of the largest commercial retail complexes in the area, the plaza itself—comprised of four two-story buildings anchored by the Dun Huang Supermarket—is its own small Chinatown community, a one-stop shop where you can find groceries, dining, and entertainment. In this one plaza alone, approximately 30 restaurants offer everything



**TIGER DEN**  
Dun Huang Plaza offers a world of culinary wonders in a strip-mall setting. Fans of Tiger Den's grilled octopus rave about its contrast of flavors and textures.

from Chinese to Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese, Malaysian, and Cantonese fare.

Once there, you can park your car and explore on foot. Though mornings tend to be sleepy at the plaza, one benefit for early birds is the abundance of options at Six Ping Bakery, including the whimsical Super Kawaii breads, which are pastries shaped like animals such as pigs, lobsters, and Hello Kitty. Everything costs less than \$2, so it's a fun place to shop for edible gifts to take home, or a quick breakfast on-the-go. Do like the regulars do: Grab an orange plastic tray, and pick up anything that looks good. I love the breads topped with sweet and salty shredded pork, the whisper-light sponge breads, and small oval loaves of Japanese cheesecake. In the refrigerator case, don't miss the *hokkaido* cream puffs: The bite-size cakes are like an Asian version of a Twinkie, soft and moist, and oozing with an ultra-light cream filling.

For lunch, one of my favorite places

is Fu Fu Cafe, a Chinese restaurant that is so popular, it opened a second location in the same plaza. The lunch specials are an excellent bargain here, when dishes such as caramelized fish in a clay pot, Mongolian beef, and salt-and-pepper shrimp can be had for \$5 or \$6. I especially like the *xiao long bao* soup dumplings, which come four to an order and are delivered to the table in a small metal steamer. When you pick up a dumpling, it sags with the weight of the soup inside, and then as you take a bite, the gingery pork broth gushes pleasingly in your mouth.

Another standout at Fu Fu is the pan-fried rice noodle pancake with beef and gravy. Topped with mounds of beef and greens in a complex brown gravy, the dish is spectacular thanks to a contrast of flavors and textures: crispy yet chewy, smoky and garlicky.

For Korean fare, try Tofu Village, which specializes in bubbling tofu hot pots known as *soondubu jigae*. Nearby, Café 101 draws couples and groups to

gather for drinks and trendy Taiwanese cuisine to a soundtrack of Korean or Japanese pop music. For Malaysian food, both Banana Leaf and Mamak are solid choices, though Mamak is newer and more spacious. Mamak even has a viewing window into the kitchen, where you can watch the cooks toss the *roti canai* (a type of flatbread that is common street fare in Malaysia) high in the air like pizza dough; it's quite the spectacle. Roti canai is usually ordered as an appetizer to be eaten with your hands; you break off pieces and dip them into a curry sauce.

Across the way, the tiny Tiger Den is Houston's best spot for authentic Japanese Hakata-style ramen and *robata* (grilled) items such as *yakitori* (grilled chicken). Tiger Den opens at 5 p.m. and doesn't take reservations, but any wait is well worth it. The spicy miso ramen and the black bean ramen are deeply flavored from 24 hours of simmering and are absolutely delicious—and a bargain for just \$9 a bowl. Tiger Den's grilled items,

such as the beef tongue, chicken skin, or whole squid, are also extremely consistent, tasty, and very affordable. Finish with an order of the *pandan* donuts—crisp, fried squares of dough served with a green custard flavored with pandan leaves; they taste like a cross between a donut and a beignet, only better.

For late-night dining, in my opinion the coolest spot to check out is Giau Bar 'n Bites. Essentially a Vietnamese tapas restaurant, Bar 'n Bites is usually filled with Vietnamese Houstonians who gather to "*nhaus*," or snack, while drinking beer and cocktails. Not only can you sip on a cosmopolitan at Giau, but you also can dine on exotic dishes such as lemongrass-steamed black-pepper whelk (a type of escargot) or chargrilled Manila clams topped with peanuts and drizzled with oil and scallions. The clams, beautifully presented on a narrow porcelain plate, exhibit a delightful smokiness and a strong umami flavor,

and pair immensely well with an ice-cold glass of Tsingtao or Heineken beer.

Dun Huang Plaza also happens to be a rewarding destination for dessert. Juice Box and Gelato Cup are popular spots for milk-tea bubble drinks and fruit-topped Taiwanese shaved ice bowls. For a special treat, however, find your way to Nu Cafe, where the claim to fame is something called "snowflake ice."

**DUN HUANG PLAZA**

is at 9889 Bellaire Blvd., on the south side of Bellaire less than a block east of Beltway 8 (also known as the Sam Houston Tollway). Restaurant hours vary widely, but the vast array of options here mean you won't be disappointed even if your first choice is closed. Most spots do not have websites but have a presence on Yelp and other sites. For addresses, see [texashighways.com/eat](http://texashighways.com/eat).

To make this Taiwanese specialty, big round blocks of ice in flavors such as peanut butter, green tea, taro, and strawberry are placed on a spinning machine that shaves them into ribbon-like flakes, eventually forming a large triangular mound. Each order can be customized with a sauce and topping of choice (mochi balls, custard, lychee jelly, fresh fruit, and many others). Whether your choice is peanut butter ice with coffee jelly (highly recommended), or a strawberry ice with fresh mango and banana, the dessert is so unusual it's worth the trek to Dun Huang just for the experience. Each bite of the snowflake ice dissolves on the tongue almost immediately, a sensation like eating icy-cold spun air.

So the next time you're visiting Houston and hesitate because you want to try real Asian food but don't know where to go, visit Dun Huang Plaza. Once you get there, it's easy: All you need to do is speak the language of food. ★



Whisler's Mezcal Paloma

# Sublime Smoke

MEZCAL SWAGGERS ITS WAY STATESIDE

text by Lori Moffatt

**I**T'S ONE O'CLOCK ON A SUNNY SATURDAY in January, and I've come to San Antonio for the day to learn more about mezcal, that delicious agave spirit that's the mysterious older cousin to tequila. It's all part of the 4th annual San Antonio Cocktail Conference, a charity-driven, four-day party that presents more than 50 drink-related seminars to the trade and general public. Along with 60 or so other mezcal enthusiasts, I've claimed my spot in the upstairs party room at Bohanan's steakhouse for a tasting of six



**MAKE IT!**  
Cocktail recipes  
at [texashighways.com/drink](http://texashighways.com/drink).

mezcal varieties and to hear the stories of their makers, or *mezcaleros*.

Before me are six champagne flutes with tiny samples of mezcal made from three family distilleries in Oaxaca and Michoacán. I taste smoke and fire, earth and grass, pepper, and citrus, but there's something else I can't put my finger on. Can one taste history and tradition?

Mezcal is the name given to all agave-based spirits. So while tequila is technically mezcal, not all mezcal is tequila, which must be made in specific regions of Mexico from the blue agave species. Mezcal, on the other hand, is made from many agave species, most commonly *espadín*, but also slow-growing *tobalá* and even *lechuguilla*.

Tequila's gone mainstream, but most *mezcaleros* still harvest plants with machetes, roast the sugar-filled *piñas* (or hearts) in earthen pits, crush them with stone wheels powered by horses or mules, and then distill the liquid in simple clay or copper stills, as they've done for at least 400 years. It's an artisanal process that predates the current fascination for all things artisanal. And now there's a market for it.

"Families who were separated for many years by work are now together again in Mexico, making mezcal," said *mezcalero* Emilio Vieyra, whose Siembra Metl brand will soon be available in the states. "I never could have dreamed I'd be with you today, sharing the spirit my family has made for generations."

As moderator David Suro put it, "Mezcal is hot."

On the forefront of the mezcal heat wave in Texas are Alba Huerta and Bobby Heugel, whose Houston bar the Pastry War (named for an 1838 skirmish between Mexico and France) serves Texas' most varied collection of agave spirits, including a portfolio of rare mezcals. One afternoon a few summers ago, before the bar's opening in 2013, Heugel described how some Mexican villages specialized in a mezcal style called *pechuga*, which is distilled through meats, vegetables, or herbs to

infuse nuances of flavor. At the time, I couldn't imagine how artisan mezcal could take off.

And then I started noticing mezcal on the menus of some of my favorite restaurants and bars. The Brooklynite in San Antonio mixes it with apple brandy and thyme. The Violet Crown Cinema bar in Austin gets creative with Campari and orange juice. Dallas' Cedars Social reinvents the "flip" with mezcal, lime, and egg white. Even bars in mid-size cities like Abilene, where a drink at the Abi-Haus features both tequila and mezcal, have taken note. "At the Pastry War," says Huerta, "we make a mezcal margarita to introduce newcomers to the spirit. It's hard not to fall in love with something that has such a strong expression of the people who made it."

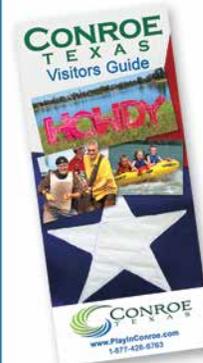
**I taste smoke and fire, earth and grass, pepper, and citrus, but there's something else I can't put my finger on. Can one taste history and tradition?**

My hometown of Austin, it turns out, has Texas' only bar that serves exclusively mezcal—a tiny, rustic room called *Mezcaleria Tobalá* (named for a wild species of agave). Open only on weekends, *Tobalá* occupies the second floor of the 1917 building that now houses a bar called Whisler's. You can order cocktails such as the Mezcal Paloma (a grapefruit soda refresher that typically uses tequila) downstairs in a chandelier-lit space with exposed stone walls, but for a fuller exploration of the spirit, book a mezcal tasting at *Tobalá*.

Here, amid weathered mirrors and antique furniture imported from Mexico, you can try tiny sips in three-quarter-ounce clay cups called *copitas*, or wet your whistle with full pours in a traditional *veladora* glass etched with a tiny crucifix. As is the custom in Oaxaca, the mezcals are accompanied

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**“It is my humble but heartfelt opinion that mezcal is a mystical beverage.”**

by orange slices dusted with *sal de gusano*, a spice made from salt, chile, and “agave worm” larvae.

“I had gone to Oaxaca to learn about mezcal, and I fell in love with the little tasting rooms there,” says former Tobalá bartender Cesar Aguilar, who developed the mezcal program with owner Scranton Twohey. “It is my humble but heartfelt opinion that mezcal is a mystical beverage. What amazes me is the resourcefulness of the plant. Agaves

grow in areas that you can’t imagine could support plants, and some wild varieties grow 25 years before you can harvest them.”

Most mezcals are distilled from an agave species known as espadín, which can be harvested every 10 years or so. But some of the rarer mezcals come from wild agaves, and forward-thinking mezcaleros are already thinking about sustainability.

Explains Raza Zaidi, whose Austin-based company Wahaka imports organic mezcal from a family distillery in the Zapotec highlands of Oaxaca, “An agave flowers once, then dies. In order to use the plant for mezcal, you have to cut the flower stem before it grows, so that the sugars remain in the piña.” Unlike the espadín agave, which multiplies by creating “pups” at its base, most wild agaves need to flower to reproduce.

“We realized that if mezcal continues to grow in popularity, producers are going to damage the environment,” says Zaidi. In response, Wahaka formed a nonprofit called the Fundación Agaves Silvestres, which works to counter deforestation of Oaxaca’s wild agaves and to support more than a dozen small mezcaleros throughout the country. And so the cycle continues.

Steeped in tradition, hard work, and the land, mezcal communicates its rich story every time you take a sip. ★



## MEZCAL MANIA

**Whisler’s and Tobalá** are at 1816 E. 6th in Austin. Call 512/480-0781; [www.whislertsatx.com](http://www.whislertsatx.com).

**The Pastry War** is at 310 Main St. in Houston. Call 713/225-3310; [www.thepastrywar.com](http://www.thepastrywar.com).

More on the **San Antonio Cocktail Conference** at [www.sanantoniococktailconference.com](http://www.sanantoniococktailconference.com).

# PLATES

EAT + DRINK + TRAVEL

TRAVEL

## Way Out West

RANCH HOUSE DINING  
AT RANCHO LOMA

*text by* JUNE NAYLOR



### LAP IT UP

*A stay at Rancho Loma includes use of the shimmering pool.*

Dinner guests can stroll a short distance from the restaurant to a lodge with marvelously comfortable rooms.

**J**UST A FEW HOURS INTO OUR FIRST VISIT TO RANCHO Loma, it was clear that my husband and I were destined to return again and again. I told Marshall so, as we sat near the crackling flames of the fire pit, winding down with conversation and coffee after an extraordinary dinner at this remote ranch house restaurant. He nodded in happy agreement.

Earlier that day, however, Marshall had asked me as we drove westward from Fort Worth, “Tell me again: What’s in Coleman, Texas?” It was a valid question, after all.

I reminded him that our dining destination was actually 10 miles outside of Coleman, about an hour southeast of Abilene, and that its reputation had intrigued me since I first heard of it a few years ago. I finally added Rancho Loma to my to-do-soon list when owners Robert and Laurie Williamson added a stylish lodging component.

Even before the debut of the five-room guesthouse, the Rancho Loma restaurant—open for dinner by reservation on Friday and Saturday—enjoyed a decade of steady business from diners who traveled to the ranch from nearby Abilene, San Angelo, and Brownwood. But as word spread and the culinary curious began trekking for dinner from as far as Midland and Dallas, the Williamsons



**RANCHO LOMA**

is at 2969 County Road 422 in Talpa. Call 325/636-4556; [www.rancholoma.com](http://www.rancholoma.com). Overnight stays start at \$190 per night, including a full breakfast; dinner usually costs \$80 per person, not including tax or tip. BYOB.

decided to add a contemporary bunkhouse. Rather than face a long, late drive home, dinner guests could stroll a short distance from the renovated 1878 ranch home that houses the restaurant to a lodge with marvelously comfortable rooms.

Our new friends Lee and Jeff, a couple from Gainesville whose company we enjoyed beside the fire pit, told us that they typically stay all weekend. “We couldn’t settle for just one night,” said Lee. “The food’s too good to quit after only one meal. And we love exploring the countryside all day on Saturday.”

That people would stay the whole weekend surprises Laurie, a self-taught chef. “There’s not a whole lot to do out here,” she notes.

That suits Marshall and me just fine. After a quick dip in the swimming pool, a visit with the family’s friendly dogs, a look around the vegetable garden, and a stop by the barn to greet the resident goats, lambs, chickens, and horses, we were ready for a nap. Before the dinner hour, we wandered onto the communal porch outside our room to watch the sun set, one of Rancho Loma’s more popular pastimes. There’s also a patio area with couches, where we sipped the wine we had brought and visited with other guests.

At dinnertime, we wandered back to the ranch house, where some 30 guests gathered at wooden tables that seat two, four, or six. With red shiplap walls, a dark beadboard ceiling, and Robert’s black-and-white photos of horses and landscapes, the resulting feel is one of casual comfort.

Marshall and I settled into a cozy nook softly lit by tea lights. We served ourselves water from a vintage blue bottle, and Robert stopped by to refill our wine glasses with a cabernet sauvignon we’d brought from home.

Soon, courses began to appear. At Rancho Loma, there’s one menu per evening. Vegetarians and those with other special diet requests can be accommodated with enough notice, but we eagerly received whatever Laurie



**RANCH PLATING**

Self-taught Chef Laurie Williamson makes good use of quail from Bandera and beef from the Yoakum area.

PHOTO: Will van Overbeek

*Longview Texas*

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sent out during our three hours of leisurely supping.

Laurie's plump grilled quail were rubbed in a slightly spicy, savory seasoning. The following course was the perfect foil: Sweet pear slices and nutty, salty Manchego cheese shavings complemented a bed of slightly bitter arugula. A judicious treatment of light vinaigrette with a sprinkling of toasted pumpkin seeds rounded out the dish with tart and crunchy components.

Simple and sublime all at once, tender ravioli pockets filled with butter-nut squash arrived drizzled with olive oil and topped with a few Parmesan shavings and a scattering of pine nuts. Our wine proved an ideal match for a rib-eye, grilled over a wood fire and accompanied by creamed Swiss chard. The finale was a dark chocolate pudding that was blessedly semi-sweet, and yet another beautiful pairing with our wine.

**At Rancho Loma, there's one menu per evening. Vegetarians and those with other special diet requests can be accommodated with enough notice.**

After a post-dinner fireside chat, we slept off the evening's indulgences and awoke to the peaceful sounds of chatty chickens and roosters nearby. We sipped coffee on the deck, then wandered back to the restaurant for a plate of Laurie's huevos rancheros over black-bean purée. When breakfast was cleared away and most guests had departed, we enjoyed a visit with Robert and Laurie at the polished concrete countertops in their casual, modern kitchen to talk about Rancho Loma's

evolution and the art of feeding people.

After leaving the television and film business in Dallas in 1998, the couple came across land in Coleman County, envisioning it at first as a weekend getaway. Soon, though, they moved here, liking its position at the top of the Edwards Plateau, with plenty of oak trees, water, and rock. "There's everything the Hill Country has, just not the population," says Robert.

Noting that travelers are often on a path between Austin and Santa Fe, Robert and Laurie set about making additional plans, including a new pizzeria that opened recently in Coleman. Additional projects in the works include a coffee shop, an art gallery, and a winery.

As Marshall and I pulled away for the drive home, we admitted we'll be back before it's time for art and coffee in Coleman. Though we've learned that it's hard to leave Rancho Loma at all. ★

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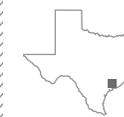
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wondered: Had they ever considered making a Texas Madeira?

After all, Madeira was the libation of choice in early America, and in early Texas. The U.S. founding fathers toasted with glasses of Madeira upon signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and after George Washington was sworn in as the first president of the United States of America in 1789, reports of his inaugural party included Washington's Madeira-stoked minuets. Here in the Lone Star State, colorful politician Sam Houston, the first elected president of the Republic of Texas and a dedicated tippler for most of his life, also favored Madeira.



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is at 6310 Ave. T in Santa Fe, about 20 miles inland from Galveston Island. Tours and tastings (\$10 for a tasting of four wines and a Madeira) take place daily. Call 409/925-1401; [www.haakwine.com](http://www.haakwine.com).

It's not really surprising: In those days, most other wines simply weren't available. European table wines deteriorated during the long journey to the Americas, but Madeira was, and is, different. Madeira was first made in the 1700s by happy accident, when ships loaded with port embarked on the six-month journey from Portugal to the New World, where the wine was exposed to heat, agitation, and oxygen—normally wine's nemeses. When the buyers tasted it, though, they found that the port had actually improved in its casks, taking on complex flavors of caramel, roasted nuts, and stewed fruit. Madeira makers these days employ other heating methods, of course, most often a heated cellar called an *estufa*.

Intrigued by the potential, the Haaks booked a trip to Portugal, tasted a lot of Madeira, and talked to Portuguese winemakers about the centuries-old process. When they returned to their

## Madeira Likes it Hot

FORTIFIED WINE COOKED UP IN SANTA FE

text by **Lori Moffatt**

**B**ENGINEER-TURNED-WINE-maker Raymond Haak and his wife, Gladys, didn't intend to stir up controversy when they started making Texas Madeira at their winery in Galveston County. The couple, who had been making wine from blanc du bois, Jacques, and other grapes since they opened their winery in 2000, had brought some of their port to a symposium at Fall Creek Vineyards in 2004. When they offered it for a tasting, Master of Wine D.C. Flynt remarked that it tasted a lot like Madeira, a fortified wine from the Portuguese islands of Madeira. He

**Growing grapes 20 miles from the ocean presents the same challenge that winemakers throughout the entire state face: finding the right grape.**

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Haak Vineyards' tasting room

winery on the Texas Gulf Coast, Raymond built a custom *estufa* on his family land in Santa Fe, stocked it for six months with his Texas port, and then aged the wine for three years in toasted American oak barrels. "I produced my first Texas Madeira in 2006, but until I had the label approved by the government, I couldn't call it Madeira," says Raymond. "It was down to the wire; I got approved two weeks before the laws changed." And yes, there are wine professionals who oppose their use of the "Madeira" name, asserting it should be used only for wines made in Portugal. "That won't stop me from enjoying the Haaks' delicious fortified wine, though," says Austin sommelier and wine writer Matt McGinnis with a smile.

Raymond isn't interested in taking that fight to the ring, anyway. Growing grapes 20 miles from the ocean is



#### MAKE IT!

Madeira-based cocktails at [texashighways.com/drink](http://texashighways.com/drink).

challenge enough. But it's the same challenge, Raymond says, that wine-makers throughout the entire state face: finding the right grape. "When we first started making wine here, back in the 1970s, I tried cabernet sauvignon, petite syrah, merlot, champanel," he says. "I was told they wouldn't do well on the Gulf Coast, because we have Pierce's disease down here. I was stubborn and thought, 'How would they know? They haven't tried growing in Santa Fe.' In a few years, though, all my vines died. The experts were right."

A few years later, the Haaks discovered a hybrid grape from Florida called blanc du bois, which is resistant to

Pierce's disease. While they grow a few acres of blanc du bois on site, the Haaks source the majority of their grapes from the Cat Springs and Conroe areas. "It has been a great grape for us," says Raymond. Winemaker Marta Sanchez, who hails from Madrid but came to Texas by way of New Mexico, makes seven different wine styles with blanc du bois, most of which visitors can sample on a tour of the winery and vineyard.

**Winery tours include a look at the *estufa* and a sampler flight of four wines and a Madeira.**

Flanked by tall Italian cypresses, antique roses, and jaggedy sago palms, the winery consists of a gift shop and tasting room, a cozy outdoor patio overlooking a few acres of grapevines, a cellar packed with wine barrels, and

a wedding chapel and ballroom with wide barn doors that are flung open when the weather's nice. You can see the entire operation, including the *estufa*, the presses, and the "library" where the Haaks keep their rarest Madeiras, on a tour (\$10), which also includes a sampler flight of four wines and a Madeira, either the tawny blanc du bois (redolent of apricot and caramel) or the crimson Jacquez (which tastes of plums, nuts, and chocolate). It's easy enough to accomplish an impromptu picnic overlooking the vineyards by purchasing olives, cheese, crackers, and other edibles, which you'll find among the glasses, chilling spouts, T-shirts, wine charms, and other goods for sale in the gift shop.

And the Haaks have seen success in recent years with events such as a "Swine and Wine Cooking Competition" (August 2 this year) and a Saturday Summer Concert Series, complete with such food offerings as shrimp étouffée,

charcuterie plates, and burgers, plus wines and wine-based cocktails.

"We've been playing around with recipes," says Raymond. "Instead of a Manhattan, which contains bourbon, we'll do a Mad-hattan with our Madeira."

After all, the Haaks know how to heat things up. ★

#### EAT AT JOE'S

**Joe's Barbeque Company**, at 1400 E. Texas 6 in Alvin, makes a good lunch or dinner stop en route to (or from) a visit to Haak Vineyards. The rambling restaurant, which is decorated with kitschy signs and ephemera from its nearly 40 years in business, today serves hundreds of people daily, who come for smoked brisket, ham, sausage, turkey, and chicken (plus a loaded salad, soup, and potato bar). Open daily. Call 281/331-9626; [www.joesbarbequecompany.com](http://www.joesbarbequecompany.com).

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## Fed at *The Shed*

EDOM'S DESTINATION DINER

text by Randy Mallory

**F**OLKS FLOCK TO THE TINY EAST Texas arts enclave of Edom for several reasons. They come for its artisans, who make jewelry, pottery, and birdhouses; for its live music and arts festivals; and also to pick blueberries and blackberries each summer at Blueberry Hill Farms. As much as anything, though, visitors come to chow down on home-style cooking at the quintessential roadside eatery, The Shed Cafe.

I know the way to The Shed as if I'm going to grandma's. Most of the verdant, 19-mile drive from my Tyler home to Edom meanders west along FM 279. I pass the Coltharp-Beall House, a 19th-Century stagecoach stop and post office at



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### EAT

Edom's original site. Then I dip into the Neches River bottom, where the two-laner straightens out to cross a narrow concrete bridge built in 1931. No wonder motorcyclists crave this ride. And no wonder that The Shed's parking lot sports shiny road bikes nearly every weekend. Classic cars come to Edom each third Saturday for Cruise Night, so it's especially fun at The Shed on those weekends, when leather-jacketed bikers and classic car-owners rub elbows with artists and berry-pickers.

**When my chicken-fried steak arrives, it's eight inches across and fork tender. I'm pretty sure that state law requires me to finish with a slice of coconut cream pie.**

But Tuesday nights are just as fun, by my reckoning. That's when local musicians bring their guitars and play in a dining room set aside for the weekly public pickin' party. I like to mingle with the regulars among the 70 or so faithful who come for good eats and roots music. "We're the musicians' groupies," says Gwen Gann with a laugh. Adds her friend Jayne Wheeler, "We sit every week at the same table, and I always order the meatloaf. The food and the music are great."

For my part, I invariably pick one of The Shed's perennial favorites—buttermilk-battered chicken-fried steak. "The only other item that sells better is our hamburger," says manager Jody Rives as I pull my chair up to a red wooden table. "Both are made with certified Black Angus beef raised here in East Texas," he tells me.

My seat lies just inside the front screened door, where I watch people come in with a hungry smile and go out with a toothpick and to-go box. I also watch the hubbub in the kitchen straight ahead, just beyond a couple of ball-capped guys sitting at the counter

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on red vinyl-and-chrome swivel stools. A team of cooks deftly piles hot food on blue-and-red plates and slides them under heat lamps next to tins of towering wheat rolls. A flurry of waiters hurry the steaming dishes to five separate dining rooms.

When my chicken-fried steak arrives, it's eight inches across and fork

tender. Peppered gravy spills over it like a creamy waterfall. My sides include rich macaroni-and-cheese and bacon-seasoned green beans, and I wash it all down with a glass of lemony sweet tea. I'm pretty sure that state law requires me to finish with a slice of coconut cream pie. With a graham-cracker crust and shredded coconut on

top, it's a sweet end to a delicious meal.

My waitress stops by again, en route to a nearby table with a plate of fresh-baked biscuits. They're twice the size of my pie and just as tall. The Shed serves breakfast all day, seven days a week. If you're really hungry, try ordering two eggs cooked to order with your choice of bacon, sausage, or a slab of ham, plus biscuits, toast, grits, and hash browns.

**On Tuesday nights, local musicians bring their guitars and play in a dining room set aside for the weekly public pickin' party. I like to mingle with the regulars among the 70 or so faithful who come for good eats and roots music.**

The Shed is the kind of place where a mound of hand-breaded onion rings tops the appetizer list. Oh, there's lighter fare—like soups and salads and grilled chicken. But the restaurant's reputation rests on such hearty Texas staples as chicken-fried-steak sandwiches, fried catfish, and cobbler à la mode. And there are blue-plate specials ranging from smothered steak on Monday to smoked brisket on Saturday. Once a month, on the weekend of nearby Canton's First Monday Trade Days, there's even turkey and dressing.

New items *do* make it on the menu, such as a few hand-cut steaks and market-fresh fish, both added by popular demand. But the wheel's not broken, so why fix it, explains Mary Ellen Malone, owner for the last decade of The Shed's half-century in business. "If you eat at The Shed, you own a piece of the restaurant. That's how loyal our customers are." ★



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# PLATES

EAT + DRINK + TRAVEL

EAT

## *Itchin' for Fried Chicken*

CHICKEN SCRATCH IN DALLAS

text by MATT JOYCE



### WINNER WINNER

*Chicken Scratch's chicken biscuit sandwich and chicken and coconut waffle are among its most popular dishes.*



**“You know how when you were a kid, and on the Fourth of July you went to the park and threw the blanket out? That’s what it’s meant to be, an overall experience, with the courtyard and music.”**

**B**EFORE OPENING HIS RESTAURANT CHICKEN Scratch in Dallas, Chef Tim Byres and a couple of friends made a five-day, 2,500-mile road trip across parts of the South and Midwest on a quest for chicken-fried inspiration.

Regional characteristics revealed themselves along the way, Byres said: the cayenne-infused spiciness of “hot chicken” in Nashville, the buttermilk-battered crispy crusts of Kentucky, and the Thanksgiving-like spreads associated with Sunday fried-chicken dinners in Oklahoma. Byres summoned such influences—both in a culinary and atmospheric sense—for Chicken Scratch, which opened in 2012 featuring chicken (fried and otherwise) in a casual beer garden with a play area for children and an outdoor music stage.

“I think there’s a big turn to nostalgic American things, and you see a lot of that in food like fried chicken and barbecue,” said Byres, a 2014 James Beard Award winner for his cookbook, *Smoke: New Firewood Cooking*, and the culinary



**CHICKEN SCRATCH** is at 2303 Pittman St. in Dallas. Hours are 11-9 Sun-Thu and 11-10 Fri-Sat; The Foundry bar opens 4 p.m.-2 a.m. Mon-Fri and 12 p.m.-2 a.m. Sat-Sun. Call 214/749-1112; [www.cs-tf.com](http://www.cs-tf.com).

**PECAN-WOOD ROTISSERIE**  
Chicken Scratch’s non-fried options include rotisserie chicken, salad bowls, stewed-chicken tacos, and chicken tamales.



creator behind the Dallas barbecue restaurant SMOKE. “That was part of the idea for Chicken Scratch. You know how when you were a kid, and on the Fourth of July you went to the park and threw the blanket out? That’s what it’s meant to be, an overall experience, with the courtyard and music. We went with fried chicken because it just seemed to make sense for that kind of family feeling.”

Nostalgia is surely a factor in the renaissance of the comfort-food staple as a focus of trendy restaurants across the state. (Lucy’s in Austin, Houston-based Max’s Wine Dive, and Sissy’s in Dallas are a few other examples.) But let’s face it: Fried chicken never

went out of style. It’s too delicious. These newer eateries are just offering welcome attention and variations to a dish that has long drawn legions to stalwarts like Babe’s Chicken Dinner House in Roanoke, Allen’s Family Style Meals in Sweetwater, and the Barbecue Inn in Houston.

Set in a semi-industrial West Dallas neighborhood just a few blocks from the

Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, Chicken Scratch and the adjoining bar, a sister business called The Foundry, share a large courtyard with a cactus garden and picnic tables shaded in daytime by a lofty elm tree, and brightened come evening by string lights. There are monkey bars and half-buried tires that beckon kids to climb, and a spigot and drinking bowls for dogs. In keeping with the



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Check out Tim Byres’ recipe for smoked ham hock and stewed collards at [texashighways.com/recipes-entrees](http://texashighways.com/recipes-entrees).

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EAT

neighborhood's industrial character, a strip of several shipping containers—cut open on the side to provide covered seating—lines one edge of the courtyard, and an imaginative stage comprised of stacked pallets hems another (bands play most weekend nights in the warmer months).

Chicken Scratch, which also has indoor seating, serves various chicken plates, including fried chicken strips and boneless thighs, as well as bone-in legs, wings, and thighs; pecan-wood roisserie chicken; and stewed-chicken tacos. Byres said the restaurant's most popular dishes of late have been its

"knife and fork biscuit sandwiches." The sandwiches come in a few different configurations, including the decadent, six-inch-tall Foundry: a split buttermilk biscuit, crispy and chewy, enveloping a fried chicken thigh layered with mashed potatoes, hefty bacon slices, beer mustard, a couple of American cheese slices, and a touch of oregano vinegar honey. Another treat is the Chicken and Coconut Waffle, a buttery waffle served with a strip of fried chicken and coconut-maple-chili syrup.



THE FOUNDRY

Chicken Scratch's adjoining bar, The Foundry, offers a full lineup of craft beers from Dallas and beyond, as well as cocktails, frozen drinks, and wine.

In both dishes, the surrounding cast of characters, such as the hearty mashed potatoes on the biscuit sandwich and the sweet syrup on the waffle, accentuate the spice and tang of the crispy chicken. The kitchen creates the savory chicken flavor, Byres said, by brining the meat in lemon-sage salt water and then coating it in flour spiced with salt, cumin, and pepper. After deep-frying, the chicken is drizzled in a touch of white vinegar and a bit of honey that's infused with fresh oregano. Depending on the dish, the cook then puts a few pickle slices on top for that "spicy-sour-vegetabley flavor," Byres said, noting he picked up the pickle technique from his mother.

"Fried chicken is mainstream in the sense that everybody knows it, but that's also difficult because everybody has their own style and flavor as they remember it as kids," Byres said. "It's kind of like brisket in Texas; everyone will fight you over it. You can't compete with a memory, but we're not trying to. At Chicken Scratch we just do our fun take on it."

And gathering with friends and family over plates of Chicken Scratch's fried-chicken dishes certainly is fun, whether you're making new memories or waxing nostalgic about the past. ★

DRINK

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Grape Escape

THE GLASS IS ALWAYS HALF FULL ON GRAPEVINE'S URBAN WINE TRAIL

text by Helen Anders

WHEN BRYAN-based Messina Hof Winery decided to open a North Texas tasting room, there wasn't much debate about which city it would call home.

"The town is called Grapevine," the winery's general manager, Nathan DeWitt, says with a grin. "You'd expect it to be a great spot."

So, in December, Messina Hof, which also has locations



FIND MORE ONLINE

The full Urban Wine Trail at [texashighways.com/drink](http://texashighways.com/drink).

in Bryan and Fredericksburg, joined Grapevine's urban wine scene. As Grapevine gears up for its 29th annual GrapeFest wine festival and competition on September 17-20, eight downtown tasting rooms and two wine bars already pour samples and glasses of various wines. (Delaney Vineyards, home of the only vineyard in Grapevine, also offers tours and tastings at its picturesque facility a couple of miles south.)

A walkable wine-tasting trek awaits, but I don't want to drive to get there, so I let the city-sponsored Grapevine Visitors

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**IVANHOE GROWN Homestead Winery makes wines from grapes grown in Ivanhoe, northeast of Sherman.**

Shuttle (\$5 for a day pass) pick my friend and me up at the Gaylord Texan Resort and deposit us on Main Street.

First stop: the tasting room of Homestead Winery, a block off Main inside a one-story 1890 Victorian house at 211 E. Worth Street. Upon entering the building, I feel a little uneven on my feet, and I haven't even had my first sip. It's not me, though. The original wood floor slopes toward the center.

Emily Parker McRoberts, the daughter of Gabe and Barbara Parker, the winery's owners, tells us Homestead's wines come mostly from grapes grown on her family's farm in Ivanhoe, near the Oklahoma border. In Ivanhoe, you can tour the vineyards and taste wines at a tasting room; wineries in Denison and here in Grapevine offer samplings

and special events. We indulge in a flight of five wines, starting with a floral white wine called Desert Rose, made from Muscat Canelli grapes with peach and pear notes. Next, we try a mellow Homestead Red, a blend of Ruby Cabernet, Pinot Noir, Merlot, and Zinfandel, offering a hint of plum. The winery's aromatic Moon Shadow Riesling tastes fruity and light; I think it would make a good porch-sipping wine.

Chilled and a little sweet, Rose of Ivanhoe, Homestead's undisputed best-seller, consistently wins gold awards at GrapeFest. Emily tells us that it's a sweeter version of Homestead Red, and that it makes a wonderful sangria as well as being a good foil for spicy fare.

"It goes great with Tex-Mex, chili, and peppery steaks," she says. "But my

## DRINK

favorite way to enjoy it is poolside, with a bowl of frozen strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries."

We end our Homestead tasting with a two-ounce pour of Chocolate Rose, a rich and sweet wine made from Ruby Cabernet grapes, then infused with dark chocolate. It's easy to see why this wine is a three-time winner of GrapeFest's People's Choice award.

**Upon entering the building, I feel a little uneven on my feet, and I haven't even had my first sip. It's not me, though. The original wood floor slopes toward the center.**

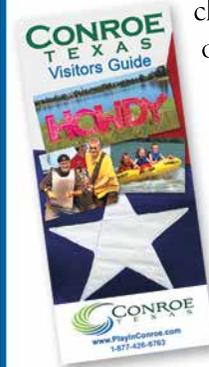
Next, we walk a few blocks to the tasting room of Umbra Winery at 415 S. Main Street, where diffused lighting and mellow jazz greet us in a chic, contemporary space with low, cushioned ottomans as well as standard tables and chairs. Poster-size canvas prints of Sophia Loren and Al Pacino survey the scene from a copper-flecked green wall, but the centerpiece of the room is a yellow resin bar illuminated by LED lights, which glow warmly through hand-laid quartz.

Umbra serves Mediterranean-inspired small plates, and we find that the spicy finish of Umbra Tempranillo from Texas' High Plains region pairs perfectly with fluffy beef-and-veal meatballs in a slightly spicy tomato sauce, as well as a gorgeous, crunchy bruschetta topped with olive oil, bright basil, roasted tomatoes, and carefully applied drizzles of reduced balsamic vinegar.

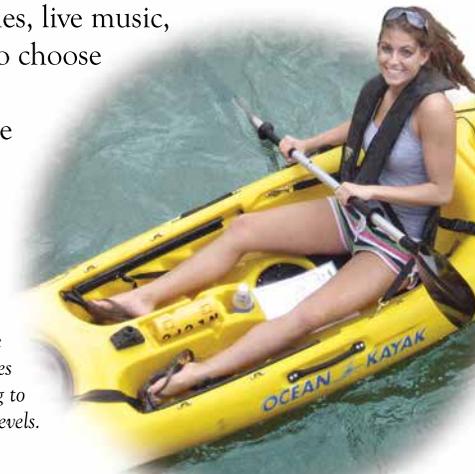
A couple of blocks south, we find the newest tasting room, Bingham Family Vineyards, at 620 S. Main Street. Here, Kyle and Gracie Bingham run a tasting room with a cool, urban vibe, complete with an open ceiling with track lighting, a granite bar, and wood tables and wooden wine racks to add elements of

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photo by Gary Rhodes

warmth. For five generations, Kyle's family has farmed vast acreage near Lubbock, but for the past decade they've concentrated on grapes, supplying them to other wineries. This year, the family is finally selling wine under its own brand. We especially like Bingham Family Vineyards' mellow and fruity Trebbiano, which strikes us as perfect for a summer evening.

Then it's time to explore the tasting room of Messina Hof, housed in a replica of the 1891 Wallis Hotel, an early railroad hotel that's an area cultural landmark. The third-oldest winery in Texas, Messina Hof opened in 1977 and now grows 900 acres of grapes in Texas' High Plains, with smaller vineyards in Denison and Bryan. Of the hundred or so wines that Messina Hof makes, about 45 are available in Grapevine, including a rotating nine on tap. Standing at the polished dark wood and marble bar, we taste a crisp Blanc du Bois with mango

and grapefruit notes and a bold, steak-worthy Sangiovese.

In addition to tastings, you can enjoy a glass of wine with cheese and charcuterie in Messina Hof's lounge, which overlooks the production area, or on the upstairs verandah, which overlooks Main Street. "If you squint hard enough and imagine taking away the neon and making the trees a little shorter," says General Manager Nathan DeWitt of the view, "you can see what Grapevine looked like 100 years ago."

Messina Hof's wines are distributed to stores and restaurants, so later in the day, we're able to order a bottle of its hearty GSM (Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvedre) with our steaks at Wine-wood Grill, an upscale restaurant down the street.

Our day winds down, so we'll save the tasting rooms of Grape Vine Springs Winery, Su Vino, and CrossTimbers for a future trip. But we have one last stop to



**ALL ABOUT WINE IN GRAPEVINE**

For more information on Grapevine, GrapeFest (held this year Sep. 17-20), and Grapevine wineries, call 800/457-6338, visit [www.grapevinetexasusa.com](http://www.grapevinetexasusa.com), or go by the Visitor Center at 636 S. Main St.

make: the tasting room of Sloan & Williams, at 401 S. Main Street, where Alan Kunst Jr. and Ralph Mattison Jr. create more than a dozen wines, including a bright Roussanne.

Tonight, though, we're after dessert. Sloan & Williams offers a selection of eight wine-flavored ice creams from the New York-based Mercer's Dairy. My favorite, a rich and creamy Port ice cream, turns out to be the perfect final note for a day of savoring Grapevine's prime product. ★

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IN GALVESTON, GAIDO'S DEFINES CLASSIC

text by June Naylor

**N**OT EVEN 10 YEARS OLD when my parents treated me to my first meal at Gaido's, the famous restaurant on Galveston's Seawall, I figured that the giant crab perched on the roof meant this was a very special place. My dad explained that Gaido's had opened in 1911, was a legend in Texas dining, and had been his favorite eating destination on the Texas coast since he was my age. That day, my earliest definition of classic dining was formed as we sat down to white tablecloths and napkins and enjoyed fresh seafood served by waiters wearing starched shirts and bow ties.

**I'm a fool for cornmeal-battered, fried oysters, which Gaido's tops with chopped bacon and hollandaise sauce.**

Countless visits later, I'm returning to Gaido's, still owned by the same family, to treat my husband to the place I consider the Texas Gulf Coast's quintessential seafood spot. I've long since changed my concept of a classic to incorporate restaurants both fancy and very casual, and Gaido's today falls somewhere between. Service remains solicitous and the tablecloths are still snowy white, but guests rarely dress up anymore for dining in the series of rooms that look much as they did in the 1970s.

The restaurant's décor serves as a

TRAVEL



I figured that the giant crab perched on the roof meant this was a very special place.

window into history, both of Galveston and the maritime world. Just inside the front door, we're greeted by a splendid collection of antique brass-and-copper deep-sea diving helmets dating from nearly a century ago. Several dining room walls are covered with vintage photography, some documenting the building and rebuilding of the historic Seawall and others showcasing the magnificent Victorian architecture for which Galveston is famous.

Some of my favorite images include those illustrating the island city's New Orleans-like cemeteries with above-ground mausoleums and crypts. But best of all is a prominent 1920s photo of smiling young women lined up on the beach and Seawall for the International Pageant of Pulchritude, a bathing-beauty revue that drew more than 100,000 spectators each year.

Arriving for Sunday brunch, we luck into a window table that gives us a view, albeit across the parking lot, of the Gulf. Looking around our dining area, I take

in a sea of tables filled with young couples, grandparents with grandchildren, vacationing families, and the after-church crowd. Judging from those arriving with gift-wrapped packages, Gaido's serves as a place for celebrations, too.

We're delighted to find that Gaido's offers a Bloody Mary bar during Sunday brunch. Once we're given glasses holding chilled vodka and ice, we help ourselves to the self-service table and add tomato juice, horseradish, Worcestershire and Tabasco sauces, and garnishes of lime, celery, and olives. Then we throw in a few non-classic options, such as pickled okra, green beans, and pieces of crisp bacon.

We fashion our meal to include a few traditional dishes, as well as some newer offerings. I'm usually a fool for cornmeal-battered, fried oysters, which Gaido's tops with chopped bacon and hollandaise sauce, but this time I'm tempted by a dish called Cy's Demise, which features a dozen charcoal-grilled oysters finished with melted butter and grated Parmesan cheese.

A house classic is the shrimp bisque, a creamy soup made with a sumptuous seafood stock, shrimp, pureed tomatoes, and sautéed carrots and onion. Alongside, we find a good foil in the lump blue crab salad mounded atop sliced avocado and tomatoes, with tart, lemony remoulade sauce for dipping. A modern twist on sautéed Gulf catch, the sautéed golden tile filet—that's a fish caught at a depth of 600 feet or more—was crusted in garlic and topped with shrimp, avocado, cilantro, and lime.

In the restaurant's brunch-specific menu, we find dishes that marry traditional and modern ideas, such as the Oysters Benedict. Poached eggs crowning oysters on the half-shell are topped with spinach, tomatoes, and hollandaise. But I'm most drawn to the Crawfish Hash, a bed of skillet-fried potatoes blanketed in saffron-crawfish fondue and hollandaise made nubby with jumbo Texas lump crab.

One night during our Galveston stay, we dress up for a dining experience of the old-school classic variety at the

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**TRAVEL**

Pelican Club, which is also owned by the Gaido family. The Pelican Club is attached to the rear of the Gaido's spread, with its separate entrance on a street one block inland from Seawall Boulevard. Compared with the informal ambiance at Gaido's, the Pelican Club evokes 1940s elegance, with subdued lighting, posh upholstery, and etched-glass details in the room dividers.

Waiting until our table is ready, we sip martinis at the sleek bar, a milky glass shelf that's lighted from below to impart a soft vanilla glow. The music soundtrack—a little Sinatra, a little Ella Fitzgerald—evokes dinnertime of elegant eras past.

Dinner at the Pelican Club isn't an experience we'd anticipated finding at the beach, but chef Ross Warhol's resume doesn't bear the usual suspects, either. His Culinary Institute of America education and work in kitchens from Spain to Napa Valley to Chicago imbued him

with haute cuisine prowess, which he pairs with keen understanding of Texas and Southern cooking.

**Looking around our dining area, I take in a sea of tables filled with young couples, grandparents with grandchildren, vacationing families, and the after-church crowd.**

The Pelican Club menu finds everything from chicken-fried steak with a cognac-and-peppercorn-infused gravy to smoked-trout salad with confit potatoes and haricots verts as accents. Our favorite items during our Pelican Club dinner include poached halibut over a bright green sweet-pea mash, and seared, dry-aged rib-eye steak with tiny potatoes and dinosaur kale.

Innovative and flavorful, the dessert of fennel mousse atop an olive oil biscuit with blackberry jam surprises and delights us both.

The two meals combine for two lasting impressions. First, we are reminded that we've overindulged yet again. But most of all, we come away knowing that a classic—in this case, the Gaido's of both old and new definitions—never goes out of style. ★



**GAIDO'S AND THE PELICAN CLUB**

Gaido's, at 3828 Seawall Blvd. in Galveston, opens daily for lunch and dinner. Call 409/761-5500; [www.gaidos.com](http://www.gaidos.com).

The Pelican Club, at 3819 Ave. T in Galveston, opens for dinner Wed-Sat. Call 409/761-5503; [www.pelicanclubgalveston.com](http://www.pelicanclubgalveston.com).

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