

# D R I V E

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SAVVY TRAVELER

## *A Day at the Beach*

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND'S  
AFFORDABLE AND FUN ATTRACTIONS

text by HELEN ANDERS

### **A WHALE OF A TIME!**

*South Padre Island's Whaling Wall mural, which enlivens the exterior of the island's Convention Centre, was painted by the marine artist known simply as Wyland.*



**If you're on the island between April and August, you might catch Kemp's ridley sea turtles nesting, one of nature's most impressive spectacles.**

**I**N A FAMILY-VACATION PHOTO TAKEN IN THE early 1900s, a family of seven poses at the edge of the surf at South Padre Island. The father wears a suit, tie, and hat; his wife and a friend pose cheerily in long dresses and hats. Only the teenage boy has taken off his shoes in anticipation of wading into the ocean.

Much has changed since those early days on the island, but that wave of pleasure that washes over most of us when we spy the Gulf of Mexico? That never changes. With a wealth of hotel rooms and condos, miles of beach, and plentiful, affordable seafood, South Padre continues to prove itself a good value for a summer trip, and for free or inexpensive entertainment, you need look no further than the island's history and its native inhabitants.

That portrait, for example, of the formal beach family with the renegade teenager is part of the free South Padre Island History Museum, a small but captivating collection on display at the South Padre Island Convention Centre. Along with



**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND,** on the southern tip of Texas, offers year-round fun. For details about accommodations, restaurants, and attractions on the island, call the South Padre Island Visitors Center, **800/767-2373;** [www.sopadre.com](http://www.sopadre.com).

coins, glassware, Civil War shell casings, and other memorabilia borrowed from the nearby Port Isabel Historical Museum, photos show well-dressed early visitors—some posing with fish taller than themselves—at the Tarpon Beach Club, a two-story bathhouse, hotel, and casino that opened in 1908. Battered by storms, it disappeared by the 1950s. You'll also learn about the Great Coyote Hunt of 1931, see 1930s blueprints for the original Queen Isabella Causeway, the model for the bridge that now connects South Padre Island to Port Isabel, and learn about the three hurricanes that hit the island in 1933.

Island historian Steve Hathcock, who has donated many of the coins on display, says, "When I moved here in 1980,

I had a job as a waiter. People would ask about the history of the island, and I wanted to know what to tell them. It became a passion."

When you're through taking in the museum, walk outside the Convention Centre and admire the 1994 *Whaling Wall* mural, one of 100 exterior whale-themed murals painted across the country by the renowned marine artist known as Wyland. Then take a stroll on a short wetlands walkway out to the Laguna Madre. You're likely to see roseate spoonbills, egrets, herons, and other birds. But, you might wonder, who are all those people on the longer walkway nearby?

They're visiting the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center next door, which, for a minimal fee (\$5 for adults), will engross you in nature and birds for hours. Trek on a 3,300-foot boardwalk through native grasses and ponds, climb high above the Laguna Madre to a five-story viewing tower, or settle in for the show behind one of five viewing blinds.

No matter the season, you're likely to see egrets, pelicans, red-winged black-birds, spoonbills, and an occasional great blue heron. Spring migration brings warblers, indigo buntings, and orioles, as well. Peer down into the shallow bay and you might see a school of fish or a parade of crabs. If you're really lucky, you might spot an alligator.

Then walk inside the birding center, where an interpretive center tells the story of the bay's ecology, bird migration, and dune formation.

From the tower, you'll spot a small structure just south of the birding center. That's Sea Turtle Inc., a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1977 to rescue, rehabilitate, and release (if possible) injured sea turtles, as well as educate the public about conservation efforts. Visiting the turtles is free, but a \$3 donation (\$2 for children) is requested.

Staff members will tell you all about the eight or so resident turtles, which can't be released into the wild due to their injuries. Allison, a green sea turtle,

**FIELD GUIDE** *to* **BASTROP COUNTY** ISSUE No 09



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Dessert Shots



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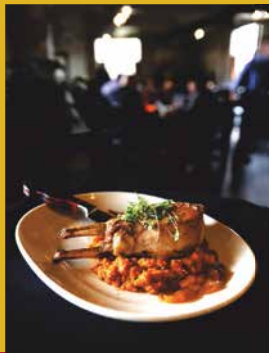
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is one of the stars. She arrived in 2005 with three of her four flippers missing, probably bitten off by a predator. She could swim only in circles and had trouble surfacing to breathe, and she would have died in the ocean. In 2006, a Sea Turtle intern fashioned a prototype for a prosthesis, the first of six that eventually allowed her to swim relatively normally. Allison wears the most recent design, a carbon-steel model that serves as a rudder, a few hours a day. As she and other turtles swim in their tanks, they notice that they have company and raise their heads—maybe not to smile, but at least to acknowledge us.

With a wealth of hotel rooms and condos, miles of beach, and plentiful, affordable seafood, South Padre continues to prove itself a good value for a summer trip.

If you're on the island between April and August, you might catch Kemp's ridley sea turtles nesting, one of nature's most impressive spectacles. When it happens, they swim out of the Gulf onto the beach and furiously dig holes in the sand with their flippers, then deposit their eggs. To keep predators from eating them, volunteers with Sea Turtle Inc. collect the eggs, incubate them, and when they hatch (typically 48 to 62 days later), the little turtles are released back into the ocean. Check for times by calling the hatchling hotline at 956/433-5735.

Also spectacular: summer fireworks over both the beach (Friday and Saturday nights at Clayton's Beach Bar) and the bay (Friday nights; best viewing between Palm and Red Snapper streets). And, of course, there's the eternal free sky show that everyone needs to catch: Sit on the beach at sunrise and watch the day's first rays throw sparkles onto the Gulf. ★



A Texas Bucket List

A FEW PLACES EVERY TEXAN SHOULD VISIT

text by Michelle Burgess

**I**N A FEW WEEKS, I'LL BECOME A FIRST-TIME grandmother when my daughter gives birth to a son, who will go by the name of Bowen. In 1833, his sixth-great-grandfather was born in Arkansas; but as they say, he got here as quickly as he could. And now, eight generations later, here my grandson will be. He doesn't realize it yet, but that makes him a very lucky boy. Like me, my daughter is a proud Texan who loves revisiting favorite destinations in the state as well as discovering new ones. But since she's the mom, she'll have all the serious decision-making on her plate, while I get to ponder such fun diversions

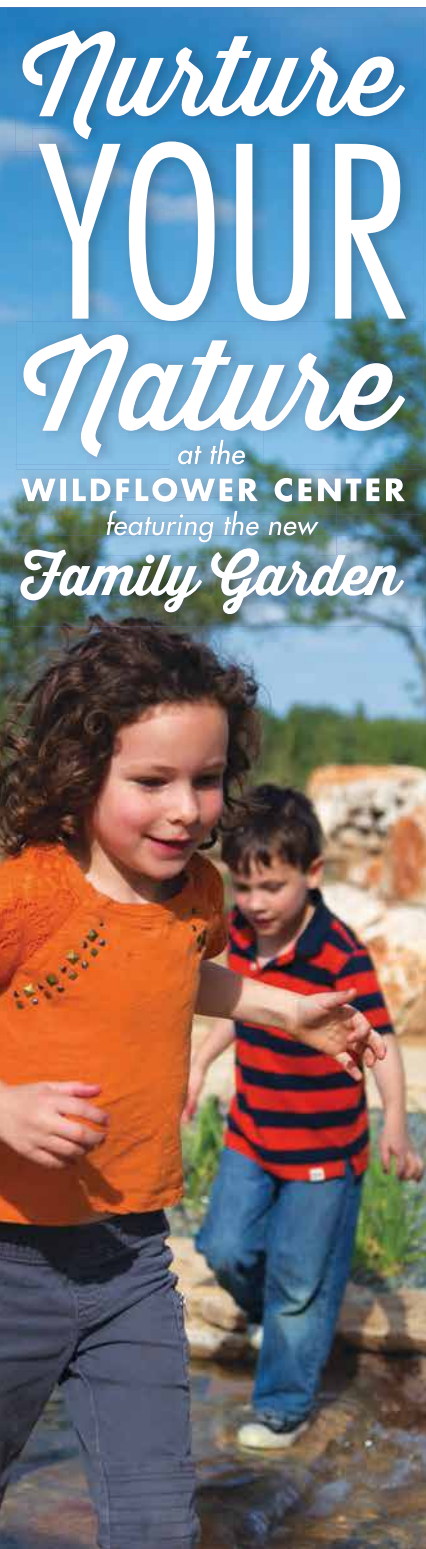


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More bucket list ideas at [texashighways.com/webextra](http://texashighways.com/webextra).

as future road trips. Here's a bucket list to get us started:

Dear Bowen,  
As your grandmother, I am thrilled to offer my services as your personal guide to the greatest state in the greatest country in the world. Most of us, natives and otherwise, have our own Texas bucket lists, and I have created one that covers some of what I'd like to show you and any grandkids that come along in the future.



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**Port Aransas**

I'm going to let you discover South Padre Island on Spring Break on your own sometime in the distant future. Well before then, I plan to take you to its northern island neighbor, Port Aransas. There's something about riding the Aransas Pass ferry across to the island and leaving the mainland behind that lets you know that vacation has officially begun. We'll rent a house right on the beach—nothing fancy, but with a deck where we can hang out in the evenings, with saltwater-crustured hair and sun-burnished noses, still wearing swimsuits and wrapped in sandy towels. If we plan ahead, we can be there over Independence Day and watch the fireworks over the Gulf. During the day we'll lose track of time as we build sand castles with moats, and when we get too hot we'll jump in the water, and I'll take you out to where it's up to my waist and you can't touch the bottom. We can take a boat from the north end of the island over to San Jose (St. Jo) Island, which offers 28 miles of undeveloped natural beauty. We'll see dolphins and all sorts of birds, and we'll hunt for seashells and cast for redfish. Later, we'll explore Mustang Island State Park on Port A's south end.

**The Great Outdoors**

Fishing has a prominent place on the agenda, including at Lake Palestine, an 18-mile-long, man-made lake on the Neches River, just southwest of Tyler, not far from where your ancestors settled in the 1880s. A few hundred miles southwest, just north of Uvalde at the southern edge of the Hill Country in Concan, we'll swim in the Frio River one summer and then, when dusk falls, we'll watch millions of Mexican free-tailed bats depart from Frio Cave. Deeper into the Hill Country north of Fredericksburg, we'll picnic at the top of Enchanted Rock, a natural dome of pink granite that offers spectacular views. That manageable hike will serve as the perfect warm-up for a trip out west to Big Bend National Park—a

rugged, 801,000-acre chunk of protected Chihuahuan Desert that's as isolated and remote as anywhere else in the entire state.

**The State Fair of Texas**

Even during the years I (reluctantly) spent out of state, as often as I could make it happen, I made a pilgrimage with your mom, or your aunt or uncle, to Dallas for the State Fair of Texas. Every Fair-going family has their system, and ours is this: We enter at the gate nearest to the Texas Star—the 212-foot Ferris wheel that is one of America's tallest (and will seem no less imposing as you grow bigger each year)—but we don't ride it until the very end. We'll make a clockwise loop all the way around the grounds, taking in the Auto Show; devouring a corny dog from Fletcher's at the feet of the fair's 55-foot-tall mascot Big Tex; sampling salsas at the fascinating Food & Fiber Pavilion; and admiring life-size butter sculptures and blue-ribbon jam at the Embarcadero. We'll also check out the agility-dog show starring former strays; the petting zoo showcasing zebras alongside baby goats; and a few rides and games—all punctuated by frequent stops for the latest and greatest in deep-fried cuisine (including, God willing, 2014's Twisted Texas Taco, a union of chicken-fried brisket, chili, fried okra, cheese, country gravy, and slaw).

**Music Appreciation**

As with the aforementioned Spring Break trip to Padre, I'll let you find a more suitable escort to Austin's yearly mega music festivals. But Dale Watson or Jerry Jeff Walker on stage in laid-back outlaw-country utopia Luckenbach? I call that date. Roger Creager pumping up a sweaty, packed-in crowd at Gruene Hall, one of the state's oldest venues, is mine, too. And as soon as you can walk, we'll hope to catch Willie Nelson perform at the John T. Floore Country Store in Helotes, where he got his start 50 years ago. You'll get a kick out of the boots and antique tools hanging from the ceiling, and when you're older,

from the pithy witticisms scrawled on wooden signs around the place.

**North Dallas Roots**

Your great-grandfather Allman and his five siblings grew up in 1940s Plano in a tiny clapboard house on the railroad tracks. These days, the lines separating Plano from Richardson and Dallas are indistinguishable, but back in his day, those few miles divided the city from the country. We can't go back and watch your granddad play tight end for the Wildcats or show his pig for the FFA, but it all happened near Haggard Park, which today is shinier and better-kept than when I was a kid. Your granddad would be amazed to find that Plano's 15th Street, once the home of five-and-dime and secondhand record stores, has been transformed by restaurants, trendy shops, and bars.

**Home**

You are fortunate to be growing up in San Antonio, the Alamo City, where tourists flock to take in all that's right here in our backyard. In the spring we've got Fiesta, an enormous citywide cultural celebration that dates to 1891, and one of the nation's largest and most prestigious agricultural expositions in the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo. There's nothing like the iconic, ever-lively River Walk lined with luminarias and lit up for the holidays. And, oh, man, the food! While you can hardly throw a rock without hitting an amazing Tex-Mex, chicken-fried-steak, or barbecue joint, I'm partial to Two Bros. BBQ Market, a northside brisket mecca with picnic tables and shade trees. We'll drop in regularly on the way home from historic Brackenridge Park, just north of downtown and home to the San Antonio Zoo and postcard-beautiful Japanese Tea Garden.

*I have only scratched the surface here. Fortunately, you have your whole life ahead of you to explore this great state's 268,820 square miles. That's a lot of Texas, with plenty of time to make a nice dent. ★*

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# Stitching a Legacy

SINGING AND SEWING, THE PLEASANT HILL QUILTERS RECALL AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY

text by **Bobbie Jean Sawyer**

**PATCHWORK HERITAGE**  
**Vernelle Richardson**  
*hand-stitches a monkey wrench block for one of the Pleasant Hill Quilting Group's blankets.*

**L**AJOYCE FLANAGAN IS SITTING IN THE LINDEN SCHOOLHOUSE where she taught more than 50 years ago, recalling the tiny desks and chairs, the children who stayed late for sewing lessons, and the day the radio delivered news of President Kennedy's assassination. These days, the two-classroom building tucked in the Piney Woods of northeast Texas no longer echoes with the chatter of schoolchildren. Instead you'll hear the whir of sewing machines, the singing of spirituals, and the memories of Pleasant Hill, one of Texas' oldest African-American communities.

The Pleasant Hill School, built in 1925 to provide education for African-American children, closed in 1964. Although the building continued to function as a space for community and church events, it deteriorated until a local preservation group secured a \$50,000 grant from the Lowe's Foundation through the National Trust for Historic Preservation to restore the schoolhouse in 2008. That's when the Pleasant Hill Quilting Group adopted the building as its workshop, where members can be



**PATTERN PATOIS**

For more on the oral history of Underground Railroad quilts, watch a video interview with Pleasant Hill quilter Flo Stevenson at [texashighways.com/madeintx](http://texashighways.com/madeintx).

found each Monday making quilts that memorialize African-American history and raise money for the schoolhouse's upkeep. (The group breaks during the summer, from June through August.)

Inside the white, wood-paneled schoolhouse, vintage school desks sit in front of the school's historic stage curtain, which bears the names of by-gone businesses that sponsored the curtain's purchase. Visitors dropping by on a typical Monday will get an inside look at the artisans at work, from laying out patterns to placing the final stitches, and a history lesson on the significance of the old school to its students, teachers, and community.

**You'll hear the whir of sewing machines, the singing of spirituals, and the memories of Pleasant Hill, one of Texas' oldest African-American communities.**

"The young people come back and they tell me what a good teacher I was and how I made an impact in their lives," says Flanagan, now 79 and a founding member of the quilting group. "[The school] meant a lot to me."

Ranging in age from 63 to 96, the 15 women of the Pleasant Hill Quilters travel the country in their 25-passenger Ford F-250 minibus visiting high schools, universities, concert halls, and churches from Texarkana to Tuskegee to showcase their patchwork. In their nearly two dozen performances per year, the quilters weave together the African-American traditions of quilting and spiritual hymns like "Wade in the Water" and "Steal Away," songs associated with slaves fleeing to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Displaying a completed quilt onstage, the women explain how runaway slaves and their supporters used quilt patterns to communicate messages along the network of routes, sympathizers, and safe havens that helped the fugitives escape

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**COLORFUL CRAFT**  
Alvis Dorsey and Flo Stevenson work on a quilt at the historic Pleasant Hill School.

to freedom in the days before abolition.

Flo Stevenson, a founding member of the Pleasant Hill Quilters, says she discovered the historical significance of African-American quilts in 2004 when she found one made of faded, tattered fabric at a flea market in Montgomery, Alabama. Or, as she tells it, the quilt found her.

"It was kind of like the quilt spoke to me and said 'buy me,'" Stevenson says.

Stevenson was drawn to the quilt's familiar "monkey wrench" pattern, a collection of rectangles and right triangles made to resemble a wrench. She had recently read about the pattern in a book, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, which describes how symbolic patterns in African-American quilts were used to covertly convey messages to fugitive slaves fleeing to safety and freedom in the early 1800s. For example,

according to oral history recounted in the book, the "monkey wrench" pattern represented a figure on the plantation, such as a blacksmith, with extensive knowledge of escape routes. A "flying geese" pattern pointed fugitives in a certain direction.

While the book has sparked debate among historians about whether the quilt code system falls under fact or folklore, Stevenson says the tale is indicative of restrictions that discouraged and often banned literacy among slaves. "If you were caught teaching a slave how to read, you were in trouble and the slave was in trouble," Stevenson

**CUSTOM QUILTS**

To order a quilt made by the Pleasant Hill Quilting Group, call 903/826-2495 to request an order form. Quilt prices start at about \$300.



**T-BONE WALKER BLUES FESTIVAL**

The Pleasant Hill Quilting Group will perform at the T-Bone Walker Blues Festival, held June 5-6 in Longview. [www.tbnewalkerbluesfest.com](http://www.tbnewalkerbluesfest.com).

says. "Oral history is all that we had."

In 2004, Flanagan and Stevenson formed the quilting club to create their own quilts fashioned after the secret-code patterns. Along with members of the close-knit Pleasant Hill community, the women embarked on a plan to teach younger generations about their ancestry and help preserve a legacy that could otherwise fade from view.

The club found a fitting home in the restored schoolhouse, which itself is an important artifact of African-American history. The 1925 schoolhouse was one of more than 5,000 Rosenwald Schools

built across the South between 1917 and 1932. Booker T. Washington, a prominent African-American educator and author, and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, part owner of Sears, Roebuck and Co., created the program to address the dismal conditions of black schools in the Jim Crow South. While schools for black children typically focused on manual labor and homemaking, the Rosenwald program built new schools that advocated a curriculum of reading and math, as well as agriculture.

Amid the organized jumble of material, thread, and patterns familiar to any avid quilter, the Pleasant Hill schoolhouse still displays remnants of the Rosenwald days. Photos of former students and teachers line the walls, including one of Flanagan—one of the last two teachers at Pleasant Hill—standing proudly next to a group of students modeling clothes she taught them to make.

Whether through their craftwork

**MADE IN TEXAS**

commemorating the Underground Railroad and African-American oral history or their promotion of the Pleasant Hill School's historic importance as a Rosenwald School, education is at the heart of the Pleasant Hill Quilting Group's purpose.

"I always wanted to be a teacher," Flanagan says. "And I'm still teaching." ★

**THE PLEASANT HILL SCHOOL**



is at 2722 FM 1399 in Linden. Tours by appointment. The schoolhouse will host

a Juneteenth celebration June 19 and the biennial Pleasant Hill Homecoming July 10-12, including a July 12 performance by the Pleasant Hill Quilting Group. Call 903/826-2495; [www.pleasanthilltexas.org](http://www.pleasanthilltexas.org).

"Sandstone Sentinel" © Jack Sorenson  
The Lighthouse in Palo Duro Canyon

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# Hometown Roy

WINK'S ROY ORBISON MUSEUM HONORS FAMOUS SON

text by Rachel Monroe

Around town, bright orange benches feature an image of those now-famous glasses and proclaim Wink as "Home of Roy Orbison."

**I**T'S NOT LIKELY THAT MANY PEOPLE STUMBLE ON WINK. THE tiny Permian Basin town (population 940) is indeed "the middle of nowhere, 500 miles from everywhere," as Roy Orbison, Wink's most famous son, once said.

Despite its remote location approximately 60 miles northeast of Odessa, Wink draws visitors from as far afield as Egypt and Australia. They make the trek to Wink to honor Orbison, the black-clad crooner responsible for hits including "Oh, Pretty Woman" and "Only the Lonely."

Born in 1936 in Vernon, Orbison and his family moved west to Wink in 1946. As a young man, Orbison was teased for his thick glasses and lack of football skills. In the decades since, however, the residents of Wink have more than made up for it by honoring Orbison every way they can. Around town, bright orange benches feature an image of those now-famous glasses and proclaim Wink as "Home of Roy Orbison." A historical plaque marks the empty lot where Orbison's family home once stood. There's an Orbison Avenue right in the center of town. And most years in



## ROY ORBISON MUSEUM

is at 205 E. Hendricks in Wink. Open by appointment, Tue-Sat. Call 432/527-3743. Free.

### YOU GOT IT

Artifacts include a pair of Roy Orbison's well-known, thick-rimmed prescription sunglasses.

June, the town hosts a Roy Orbison festival with events like a Pretty Woman Pageant and a concert (plans for a 2015 festival were tentative as of press time).

Wink's main draw is the Roy Orbison Museum, a one-room celebration of everything Orbison, where you'll find photographs, posters, guitar picks, and all sorts of memorabilia evoking Orbison's time in Wink and beyond. Given Wink's remoteness, odds are you'll have the Orbison Museum to yourself. All the better to explore the museum's small collection, such as a display case with copies of the Wink High School yearbook from the early 1950s, when Orbison was a student. In his class photograph, Orbison beams out an earnest grin; in his senior quote, he proclaims his desire to lead a Western band and "marry a beautiful dish."

Back then, Orbison played in a country band with a handful of classmates; their name, the Wink Westerners, was coined by one of their high school teachers. The museum includes photographs of the Wink Westerners, as well as of the West Texas honky-tonks where Orbison cut his teeth playing rockabilly and country standards. Orbison had not yet adopted his signature costume of black clothes and sunglasses. Indeed, he hardly looked like a rock star at all. There's no indication that within a decade, he'd become one of the most famous musicians in the country, with more than two dozen Top 40 hits to his name.

The many photographs on the museum's walls trace Orbison's rise to fame. After graduating from high school in 1954, Orbison attended college intermittently in Denton and Odessa as he honed his musical style with bands including the Wink Westerners and The Teen Kings. Orbison had short-term deals with Sun Records and RCA Victor in the late 1950s before signing with Monument Records in 1959, setting the stage for a remarkable four-year run. With songs like "Only the Lonely," "Crying," "Dream Baby," and "Love Hurts," Orbison showcased his

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three-octave voice and his uncanny ability to channel deep emotions in a three-minute pop song. Many of these early 45s and LPs are displayed in an open case at the museum, ready for you to flip through and admire their vintage cover art—though, alas, there is no record player available to listen to them. The collection even includes an original

pair of Orbison's iconic prescription Ray Ban sunglasses, which were donated to the museum by the singer's second wife, Barbara, after he died of a heart attack in 1988 at age 52.

All the LPs, posters, books, cassettes, and videos devoted to Orbison might lead you to believe that he was wildly successful throughout his entire life. In

fact, after touring with the likes of the Beatles in 1963 and the Beach Boys in 1964, Orbison found his music falling out of favor, perceived as outdated. Then he was hit by a series of tragedies: In 1966, his first wife, Claudette, died in a motorcycle accident; two years later, while he was on tour in England, his Nashville-area home burned down. Two of his three sons were killed in the fire. (He later had two more sons with Barbara.)

**If you don't know all the Orbison lore, take the time to brush up before you visit the museum—it'll make the objects all the more poignant.**

It wasn't until the final decade of his life that Orbison began to be rediscovered, thanks to famous fans like Bruce Springsteen and David Lynch, who featured Orbison's song "In Dreams" in his 1986 film *Blue Velvet*. Van Halen scored a hit with its version of "Oh, Pretty Woman" in 1982, and in 1987, Orbison was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The Orbison Museum has only a handful of artifacts pertaining to Orbison's return to the charts as a member of the Traveling Wilburys, the supergroup he formed with Tom Petty, George Harrison, Bob Dylan, and Jeff Lynne, in the months before his death.

The Roy Orbison Museum lacks explanatory signs to walk curious visitors through this history, though your docent will answer questions and offer up Orbison anecdotes if you ask. Perhaps if you make it to the museum, you're already a fan—and you probably already know the story. If you don't know all the Orbison lore, take the time to brush up before you visit the museum—it'll make the objects all the more poignant.

In the end, though, this small, remote museum isn't just a monument to Orbison; it's also a testament to Wink's long-standing pride and affection for a man who often felt like a misfit. ★

**ROCK ART**

*The Vulcan Gas Company, Armadillo World Headquarters, and other Austin clubs of the era hired poster artists to promote their concerts.*



# Drawn to the Scene

WITTLIFF COLLECTIONS EXHIBIT TRACKS  
EARLY AUSTIN MUSIC POSTERS

text by Michael Corcoran

**A concert wasn't a reality until it was advertised with a mind-blowing poster.**

**D**URING AUSTIN'S COUNTERCULTURE HEYDAY, from the opening of the Vulcan Gas Company in 1967 to the closing of the Armadillo World Headquarters in 1980, a concert wasn't a reality until it was advertised with a mind-blowing poster. The images and information went together like words and music to create a siren song for fans. But as exemplified by the exhibit *HOMEGROWN: Austin Music Posters, 1967 to 1982*, which runs through July 3 at The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University in San Marcos, the flat artifacts of



**MUSING APP**

For an interactive tour of the exhibition, visitors can download Musing, a free app that provides audio and video info on the posters using image-recognition technology.

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**SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

The exhibit includes posters depicting blues musicians and the punk/new wave era.

anticipation have become, in most cases, the last thing standing. Clubs close and are torn down. Bands break up. But posters endure as history to admire.

With music by the bands featured in the posters gently piped in, the multiple exhibition rooms are filled with recordings for the eyes. One hundred and forty vintage posters recall the consecutive musical eras of psychedelia, blues, progressive country, and punk/new wave that gave Austin its reputation as a live music mecca. The worst thing about seeing a band in a club is that when the show's over, it's over. (Also, sometimes

one of the best things.) But a poster is a lasting excuse to daydream back to your skinny-jeans days.

Great music inspires creativity of all kinds, and the visual artists of the Texas capital were drawn to sheets of paper where they could create visual music. Clubs catering to a range of genres—from the hippie-blues-country mix at the Vulcan, Armadillo, and Soap Creek Saloon, to the blues at Antone's, and the new wave scene at Raul's and Club Foot—hired such posterfarians as Micael Priest, Danny Garrett, Kerry Awn, Guy Juke, Ken Featherston, and

Sam Yeates to make their shows seem cooler. These are just a few of the artists whose posters hang at the Wittliff.

Also well-represented are the pioneers of the Austin poster scene: Gilbert Shelton, the original Vulcan art director, and Jim Franklin, who would replace him in '68, when Shelton moved to San Francisco and launched his underground comic "The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers." A spirit of unity among the artists far outweighed any competition, Franklin said. "There was no trace of jealousy or animosity between the artists," he said. "That comes

**TEXAS TICKET**

with lesser talents. We just loved art and felt like we were all in it together."

Though the accepted chronology has Austin artists following San Francisco's lead, the first "60s underground comic" was actually produced in Austin by artist and historian Jack "Jaxon" Jackson in 1964. Jackson's "God Nose" came out four years before the first Zap Comix hit the streets of San Francisco. Jackson's artwork and copies of *The Ranger*, the University of Texas' irreverent magazine that unleashed Shelton, greet you in glass cases as you enter the exhibit. The beginning is always a good place to start.

As during its time of focus, *Homegrown* is rich with images of armadillos, the local hippie-slacker symbol that set Austin apart from the Haight-Ashbury scene of national obsession. The 'dillo was Franklin's doing. In 1968, he was hired to draw a poster for a "love-in" concert at Wooldridge Park and was thumbing through a zoological guidebook when he came across an armadillo. That was the critter, that rat with aluminum siding, that years before had nearly scared the life out of a 10-year-old Franklin when one ran between his legs on a hunting trip with his dad. Franklin drew a 'dillo smoking a joint—an image included in the exhibit—thereby creating a new mascot for Austin's weirdness. Surreal visions and lighthearted irreverence, such as Yeates' tiger with the guitar neck tongue for a Bob Seger

**HOMEGROWN: AUSTIN MUSIC POSTERS, 1967 TO 1982**

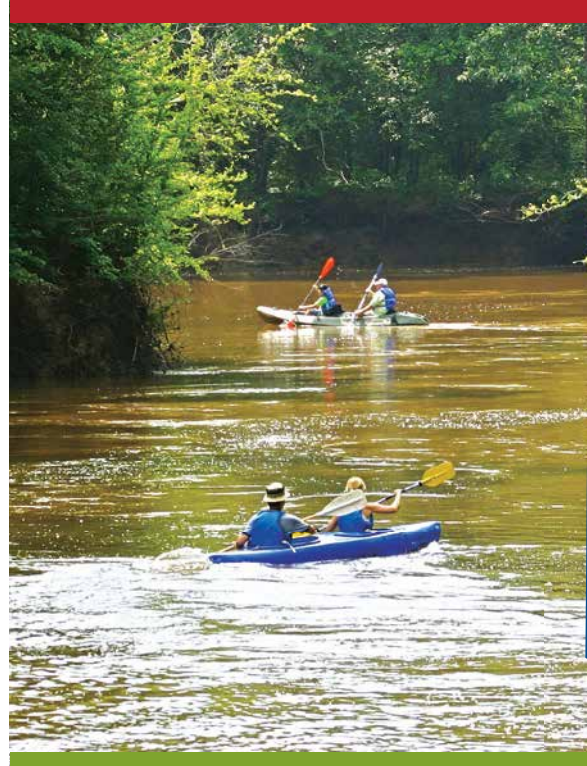
The exhibit runs through July 3 at the Wittliff Collections, located on the 7th floor of the Alkek Library at Texas State University in San Marcos. Hours are 8-5 Mon-Wed and Fri; 8-7 Thu; 11-5 Sat; and 2-6 Sun. Free. Call 512/245-2313; [www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu](http://www.thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu).

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concert, gave Austin's poster scene its own identity.

The image always came first for Franklin and the others, with the details of time and place included at the poster's bottom or edge. "The music was the castle, separated by a moat," Franklin said. "Then came the village, the marketplace. Every time I drew a

poster, it was made so that the information could be cut out and the rest could stand alone as a work of art."

The rooms of the exhibit are divided into five groupings, starting with Vulcan Gas Company and psychedelic images touting bands such as Conqueroo and Shiva's Headband. The "Blues Portraits" section highlights

the importance of blues to the development of Austin's music scene, featuring drawings of musicians like Muddy Waters, Freddie King, and Mance Lipscomb. The stroll continues with a room devoted to "Reimagining Texas," which is the umbrella shading such genre-bending Austin acts as Willie Nelson, Doug Sahm, Freda and the Firedogs, and Greezy Wheels, who mixed musical styles and substances to create a new kind of country groove.

**Clubs close and are torn down. Bands break up. But posters endure as history to admire.**

Another exhibit area contains a host of posters for "Traveling Bands," from the Grateful Dead to Taj Mahal and Bruce Springsteen. The last stop on this Austalgia train is a smaller area featuring posters of the "Punk and New Wave" scenes of the late 1970s and early '80s, the prime time of local bands like the Big Boys, the Dicks, and Joe "King" Carrasco.

But your journey through Austin's glory years isn't over when *Homegrown* ends. Next door, The Wittliff Collections' exhibition *Armadillo Rising: Austin's Music Scene in the 1970s* features some of the best Willie Nelson memorabilia available, including a songbook of tunes he'd written by age 11. The two shows go together like queso and jalapeños on the famous nachos at the Armadillo World Headquarters. ★



**HOMEGROWN: CATALOGUED**

The University of Texas Press has released a catalog of *HOMEGROWN: Austin Music Posters 1967 to 1982*, edited by Alan Schaefer. The survey of Austin music poster art from the time period includes 122 poster images.



# The Smallest Gifts

## A BIRTHDAY WISH AT MCALLEN'S QUINTA MAZATLAN

text by Daniel Blue Tyx

**Our backyard is no Quinta Mazatlan, but it turns out that birds aren't really that picky, as long as food and water are available.**

**T**HE 10-MINUTE DRIVE FROM OUR HOUSE IN MCALLEN to Quinta Mazatlan, one of the most popular sites in the Rio Grande Valley's World Birding Center network, takes us past historic downtown, the airport, and the shopping mall—not exactly what you'd expect for a trip to a lush nature center. And that is precisely the point, says Quinta Mazatlan Manager Colleen Hook. The McAllen metro area is one of the fastest-growing areas in the United States, yet it lies at the convergence of two major migratory flyways. "Our niche is a 'home and a habitat,'" Hook explains. "We serve as a demonstration site of what you can design around your own home to support and attract wildlife. More than 225 bird species have been documented here. It's truly an urban sanctuary."



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# MAKE A DAY OF IT

Historic points of interest: Home of the World's First Rodeo, est. 1883, West of the Pecos Rodeo Grounds, Texas Rodeo Hall of Fame and West of the Pecos Museum with Judge Roy Bean Courthouse Replica, known as the "Law West of the Pecos".

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- BALMORHEA STATE PARK 43 miles
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- MCKITTRICK CANYON 95 miles
- GUADALUPE PEAK 99 miles
- BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK 157 miles



**HUMMINGBIRD HAVEN**

*Quinta Mazatlan's lush grounds attract hundreds of bird species, including six species of hummingbirds. The common ruby-throated hummer (left) measures less than four inches.*

Quinta Mazatlan's "home" is an 80-year-old Spanish Colonial Revival-style mansion—at more than 6,700 square feet, it's one of the largest adobe structures in Texas. Complete with a Roman bath and thousands of hand-painted tiles, it was the wonder of McAllen when it was finished in 1935. But the property had fallen into disrepair by the time it went up for auction in 1998. That's when city leaders stepped in and purchased Quinta Mazatlan, envisioning a public space that could protect ecologically sensitive land, deliver environmental education programs, and attract tourists to the region. "Thus," Hook says, "the creation

of a 'mansion with a mission'—restoring habitat one backyard at a time."

High on a hill, the mansion was the first thing I saw when I arrived with my bird-loving son Byrdie and his plucky two-year-old sister Ana. It was Byrdie's fourth birthday, and I had let him choose our destination for the afternoon. "Please follow the red brick path to the main house," the sign at the gate invited, and the kids sprinted along the palm-lined promenade in that direction.

Before we could make it to the gorgeous, hand-carved doors, though, we were sidetracked by an invitingly tranquil courtyard: the hummingbird

garden. As Byrdie and Ana marveled at the tiny birds, which darted from one nectar plant to the next, I sat on a stone bench, listening to the distant sounds of the city mingle with the gurgle of the fountain and the rustle of native Turk's cap and esperanza plants. Although some birds need large expanses of woodland to survive, others—like hummingbirds—are actually well-suited to urban living. The secret is to provide them with the right kind of habitat—such as colorful nectar-producing native plants. If you build it, the birds will come: Quinta Mazatlan is frequented by four different species of hummingbirds, and recently welcomed broad-billed and blue-throated varieties—extremely rare visitors from central Mexico.

After 15 minutes of hummingbird watching, we made it into the mansion. But a full tour would have to wait for another day. By the time I managed to grab a handful of fliers for upcoming events—the park offers programs

for everyone from toddlers to Master Gardeners, as well as the annual Hummingbird Days in September and the Vida Verde Earth Day festival in April—Byrdie and Ana had made a beeline for the Forest Sculpture Trail. There, 25 lifelike bronze sculptures of Valley fauna—ranging from big cats to a buff-bellied hummingbird—are set against the backdrop of their preferred habitats. Next, we made our way to the children's Discovery Center, where the kids burned off some of their boundless energy by climbing logs and boulders.

Soon it was time to return to the mansion's gift shop to make good on my birthday promise. I helped Ana choose a nifty owl pen while Byrdie browsed through toys, books, and handmade Mexican papier-mâché bird rattles. At last, he announced his selection: a red Best-1 Hummingbird Feeder (\$12), which was manufactured in Poteet.

**Although some birds need large expanses of woodland to survive, others—like hummingbirds—are actually well-suited to urban living.**

His wish: To bring hummingbirds to our own yard.

I was touched by the simplicity of his birthday wish. But I was also more than a little worried that he'd be disappointed should no birds arrive. At home, I helped Byrdie follow the instructions for preparing the nectar, and we installed a hook for hanging the feeder on the back porch. For a few days, my fears appeared to be confirmed. No hummingbirds arrived, and Byrdie grew impatient.

Then, one morning, there it was: a migratory ruby-throated hummingbird,

so close that we could see the jeweled collar that lends the species its name. Byrdie's face radiated joy. His birthday wish had come true.

Since then, our success with the feeder has inspired us to try our hand at planting our own garden of native species—and hummingbirds visit by the dozens. Our backyard is no Quinta Mazatlan, but it turns out that birds aren't really that picky, as long as food and water are available. Thanks to Byrdie, our family has a gift better than any plastic trinket. True to the spirit of the "mansion with a mission," we have brought the hummingbirds home. ★



**QUINTA MAZATLAN**

is at 600 Sunset Dr. in McAllen. Hours: Tue-Sat 8-5, Thu 8-7. Call 956/681-3370; [www.quintamazatlan.com](http://www.quintamazatlan.com).

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## 50 Years of TEXAS

A MUSICAL'S MILESTONE  
ANNIVERSARY REFLECTS THE  
PANHANDLE'S ENDURING SPIRIT

*text by* RUSSELL GRAVES



**T**HE INFECTIOUS OPENING SONG of *TEXAS*—a bouncy Broadway-style tune sprinkled with Texas swagger—sticks in your head long after the outdoor musical ends. “There’s no better place to be than Texas,” proclaim the singers and dancers, sweeping their arms to the colorful backdrop of Palo Duro Canyon State Park. “You can look around and see in Texas.”

Celebrating its 50th season this summer, *TEXAS* dazzles audiences with its one-of-a-kind blend of musical theater and scenery in Pioneer Amphitheatre, an 1,800-seat venue at the base of Palo Duro Canyon, located 12 miles east of the town of Canyon. Against the red rock walls of the nation’s second-largest canyon, the musical chronicles the fictional tale of Calvin Armstrong, a young homesteader determined to

**The musical chronicles the fictional tale of Calvin Armstrong, a young homesteader determined to scratch out a place for himself in the tough environment of the Texas Panhandle in the late 1800s.**

scratch out a place for himself in the tough environment of the Texas Panhandle in the late 1800s.

A cast of more than 60 actors, dancers, and singers (about a third of them students at nearby West Texas A&M University in Canyon) performs the story, which incorporates historical events like wildfires and the arrival of the railroad, plus legendary real-life characters such as Comanche Chief Quanah Parker and cattleman Charles Goodnight. State-of-the-art sound, stage lighting, and pyrotechnics—even a startling bolt of lightning—enhance the show, as do the “Dancing Waters of

Texas,” choreographed water jets that enliven the event’s finale, a patriotic tribute to Texas and the United States.

“What I’ve discovered is that everyone takes a very personal experience from the show,” says Dave Yirak, a 17-year veteran of the play and the artistic director for the past 10 years. “People who’ve worked on the show have a deep love and appreciation for the production, and that translates to the audience. The audience, in turn, takes away their own special memories.”

*TEXAS* traces its roots to 1960, when Canyon resident Margaret Harper, a teacher, musician, and community leader, reached out to Paul Green, a North Carolina playwright known for writing musical dramas based on local history in other locations in the United States. Within a year, Green visited the Panhandle and agreed to create the musical. Pioneer Amphitheatre opened in 1962 and presented the musical *Fandangle* (still performed every June as *Fort Griffin Fandangle* in Albany), and in 1966, the first season of *TEXAS* opened.

The show has changed over the years, but not very much. Yirak says the artistic staff “tries to give the audience something a little different each year,” such as subtle changes to a scene or two, or more elaborate features like the choreographed water jets and the patriotic grand finale.



**TEXAS**

starts at sunset (about 8:30) on Tuesdays through Sundays, June 2 to August 15, at Pioneer Amphitheatre in Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Ticket prices range from \$16.95 to \$30.95 for adults and \$12.95 to \$26.95 for children 12 and younger. Call 806/655-2181; [www.texas-show.com](http://www.texas-show.com).

**TRADITION AT PLAY**  
*TEXAS* features a cast of more than 60 performers, along with special effects like a nightly fireworks show.



show will punch up the grand finale with extra fireworks and an enhanced water show. There will also be a reunion for alumni performers on the weekend of July 17th with festivities including a party, tours of West Texas A&M University, dance classes, and a trip to the show with a chuck-wagon dinner.

According to the foundation’s count, about 67,000 visitors attend the 65 summertime performances each year. Of those attendees, 60 percent travel from more than 100 miles away. On a wall of the concession shop that sells drinks and souvenirs, maps of Texas and the world are covered with pins marking the hometowns of those who’ve attended *TEXAS*, a geographic representation spanning the globe.

Almost every summer for the past 21 years, I’ve taken my family and friends from afar to see the musical. While the play is mostly the same from year to year, the production introduces enough tweaks to the story line and various



# FIELD GUIDE to BASTROP COUNTY

ISSUE  
No. 63



## Knot Tying

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### MADE IN TEXAS

special effects to retain my interest in the epic tale.

Aside from the play itself, the entire *TEXAS* experience is enjoyable for the family. Before the show begins, visitors gather outside on the amphitheater patio while a live band plays familiar country music songs. Others attend the pre-show Chuck Wagon Bar-B-Que, a buffet meal of brisket, sausage, and sides, held in a picnic area in the adjacent foothills.

**On a wall of the concession shop that sells drinks and souvenirs, maps of Texas and the world are covered with pins marking the hometowns of those who've attended *TEXAS*, a geographic representation spanning the globe.**

Beyond the picnic area, families explore the surrounding hills of the state park, which are strewn with rocks and boulders. With a short climb to one of the nearby hilltops, hikers take in a sweeping, panoramic view of the sheer, red canyon walls stippled with various hues of gray, ochre, and yellow. Contrasting with the rocks, the canyon floor is a patchwork of green mesquite and juniper. When people from outside of Texas think about Texas, this is probably close to what they imagine.

The rugged beauty of Palo Duro Canyon ties directly into *TEXAS* and its timeless story of love, hardships, and sacrifice. As such, audiences connect with the struggles and triumphs of Calvin Armstrong and the supporting characters. Their pioneer spirit and heritage of resiliency still shape the Texas Panhandle to this day. ★



#### VISIT CANYON AND AMARILLO

Find Canyon and Amarillo tourism information at [visitcanyon.tx.com](http://visitcanyon.tx.com) and [visitamarillo.com](http://visitamarillo.com).

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**ON TRACK FOR FUN**  
Klyde Warren Park, with attractions including a splash pad and ping-pong tables, is within walking distance of the DART St. Paul and Pearl/Arts District light-rail stations.

animals representing more than 500 species. Memorable exhibits include *Giants of the Savanna*, which features lions, elephants, and zebras in naturalistic habitats. Children enjoy the opportunity to feed giraffes by hand from a platform that provides eye-to-eye interaction. Through September 7, the zoo is also showcasing more than 25 roaring, animatronic dinosaurs in its *Giants of the Jurassic* exhibit.

The zoo opens 9 a.m.-5 p.m. March through October 23; it closes at 4 p.m. the rest of the year. General admission is \$15; \$12 for seniors and kids ages three to 11.

**Cityplace/Uptown Station (Red, Orange, and Blue lines)**

This is the only underground station in the DART system, with tracks that are 10 stories below street level. The six escalators that carry riders from the platform to the surface are the longest



your kids (or you) may have ever seen; four are 138 feet, which made them the longest escalators west of the Mississippi when the station opened in 2000, according to DART. As if that weren't enough fun, you can also ride the incliners—elevators that travel on an incline. Their walls are windows, prompting kids to press their noses to the glass and watch their destination draw closer.

Once you reach the surface, you can hop on the M-Line Trolley. Its six vintage streetcars run through the Uptown neighborhood between Cityplace/Uptown Station and downtown Dallas. Stops along the way include the chic West Village Shopping Center and Klyde Warren Park, a five-acre green space built over a freeway that offers everything from a playground and ping-pong tables to concerts, croquet, and food trucks.

**Downtown Carrollton Station (Green Line)**

This station is so close to Babe's Chicken Dinner House that your nose will lure you there as soon as you step off the train. Babe's has an ultra-casual atmosphere and a simple menu—five entrées, including fried chicken and chicken-fried steak, and six sides, such as mashed potatoes and green beans—all served family-style. If you have trouble

# DART Hopping

KID-FRIENDLY EXCURSIONS ON THE DALLAS LIGHT-RAIL SYSTEM

text by Dan Koller

**I**F YOUR KIDS ARE LIKE MINE, THEY'RE FASCINATED by trains. Perhaps it's the powerful sound of the horn at crossings, the rumble of locomotives chugging alongside the highway, or the magic of an unusual sight found mostly in cartoons, movies, and storybooks. Maybe it's just the allure of traveling without seatbelts. Whatever the reason, children love trains—and so do many of us grownups.

The Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) light-rail system includes 90 miles of track and 62 stations along four color-coded lines. The system, which recorded 96,380 passenger trips per weekday in 2014, bustles with commuters on a daily basis. But it also provides an entertaining and convenient

For my six- and nine-year-old sons, the light-rail journey is half the fun.

way to explore the Dallas area, offering access to a variety of the city's attractions. For my six- and nine-year-old sons, the light-rail journey is half the fun. Here are five family-friendly destinations that justify climbing aboard.

**Dallas Zoo Station (Red Line)**

This station is just steps from the entrance to the Dallas Zoo, which is open 364 days a year. (Even the animals get Christmas off.) It's home to some 2,200

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As seen in True West Magazine

getting your server's attention, it's likely because he or she's engaged in one of the periodic renditions of "The Hokey Pokey," which your kids will be invited to join. Babe's opens 11 a.m.-9 p.m. daily, but closes between 2 and 5 on weekdays.

For dessert, stroll across the square to Bloom's Candy & Soda Pop Shop, where more than 800 varieties of

candy—think Goo Goo Clusters and Double Decker Moon Pies—and 250 bottled sodas, such as Sioux City Sarsaparilla, dazzle the eyes. No matter how varied your family's tastes, everyone will find something to satisfy their sweet tooth. Bloom's is open until "8-ish" Sunday to Wednesday and "9-ish" Thursday to Saturday.



It may be too early to tell which list you'll make, but it's never too early to reserve a ride on the Austin Steam Train's North Pole Flyer. Get a head start on Christmas shopping and be prepared to catch the fun this December as Santa and Mrs. Claus take you for a ride on the jolliest train around.

Visit our website to reserve your seats for the North Pole Flyer, departing December 2015.



### Downtown Plano Station (Red and Orange lines)

This station is right next to Haggard Park, where you will find two things important to all young families: playgrounds and restrooms. If you want to maintain the train theme, you can also visit the Interurban Railway Museum, a monument to the electric trains that linked regional towns from Waco to Denison in the first half of the 20th Century. Admission is free, but the hours are limited: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. weekdays, 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. On the other side of the tracks is downtown Plano, a quaint historic district with restaurants—Kelly's Eastside offers a comfortable patio and a wide-ranging menu of sandwiches and burgers—and boutiques, such as La Foofaraw, an antiques, home décor, and floral shop.

### St. Paul Station (All four lines)

In the heart of downtown Dallas, this station is just a few blocks from Klyde Warren Park, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Nasher Sculpture Center. The Dallas Museum of Art offers free general admission, while the Nasher is free for children younger than 12 and \$10 for adults. Both museums offer an array of activities for children, including activity tote bags at the DMA and the Nasher's family programming and free entry on the first Saturday of each month.

Before going back to the DART station, mosey to Klyde Warren Park for a snack and to encourage the kids to burn some energy before boarding the train—all the better to enjoy the ride. ★

### RIDING DART

For DART rail system information, including maps and schedules, visit [www.dart.org](http://www.dart.org). Day passes cost \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children ages 5-14; two-hour passes cost \$2.50 and \$1.25, respectively. Children younger than five ride free with a paying adult.

# Unbridled Spirit

## TRAVAASA AUSTIN'S EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

text by Lori Moffatt

Travaasa offers more than a typical spa's roster of indulgences and fine meals.

**M**Y HORSE ANNIE, A 16-YEAR-OLD CHESTNUT mare with soulful eyes and long lashes, relaxes her ears and ambles calmly toward me in the round pen, then breaks out in a yawn so wide I think she might be laughing at me. But things aren't always as they seem. Wrangler Jodie James tips back his hat and looks upon us with a glimmer of pride. "That's just about the biggest compliment a horse can pay a person," he tells me in a calm drawl. Say what?

Of course, Annie didn't say a word, and that's the point. I'm here at Travaasa, a resort and spa on the outskirts of Austin, hoping to learn more about non-verbal communication via the resort's popular Equine Encounter program, one of many activities included in a stay. Surrounded by the cedar brakes, shin oaks, and



### FIND MORE ONLINE

A chat with Travaasa Farm Manager Kim Grabosky at [www.texashighways.com/webextra](http://www.texashighways.com/webextra).



PHOTO: Courtesy Travaasa Experiential Resorts



**CANYON RIDE**  
For an additional fee, Travaasa guests can ride horses through the canyons surrounding the resort.

rugged canyons of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, Travaasa offers more than a typical spa's roster of indulgences and fine meals. Yes, a massage here may lull you into a dream state, and Chef Ben Baker's attention to wholesome yet delicious cuisine may make you wish for a personal chef. But this place is about experiences. In fact, your room rate includes unlimited access to dozens of activities, including a ropes challenge course with a climbing wall and zipline, archery sessions, yoga and Pilates, swimming in a saline pool, two-step lessons, chicken-keeping, wine-tasting, making herbal tinctures, geocaching, hiking, riding a mechanical bull, and, in the stables near the resort's 3-acre farm, a tranquil exercise in self-awareness and sensitivity called the Equine Encounter.

But before the five of us enter the round pen with our horse, we'll need to learn a few things about trusting our

**Keith delves into a topic I find surprising for a gravelly-voiced cowboy who has wrangled horses his whole life on ranches from Wyoming to Texas: the power of vulnerability.**

leadership skills and projecting our confidence and energy. In the distance, the sounds of chortling chickens and the staccato songs of cicadas meld with the breathy whuffs and musical whinnies of a dozen horses as they spy us approaching the paddock area. Jodie releases them into the dusty arena, and they gallop and buck, then suddenly drop to the ground, one by one, rolling in the dirt like gleeful puppies. Equine and Agriculture Manager Keith Moon, who'll guide us through today's exercises, smiles. "Part of that is stretching," he tells us. "It helps to realign their spines. But it also gets the bugs off."

"Our program is about giving the horses a stress-free environment, keeping them in a relaxed state of mind," he says. "Horses are very aware. They know everything that's going on around them, and their self-preservation is geared toward good leadership. Within the herd, they're looking for a strong animal to keep them safe, so if we take that role, it comes down to how precise and consistent we can be with our energy and our cues to them so we create an environment where they feel comfortable, where they trust us."

Our exercise will be simple: Without saying a word or touching them, we'll direct their movements, ask them to change directions, then ask them to come to us. Our body language will do the communicating for us.

Then Keith delves into a topic I find surprising for a gravelly-voiced cowboy who has wrangled horses his whole life on ranches from Wyoming



PHOTOS: Courtesy Travaasa Experiential Resorts

# BOOGIE DOWN in New Braunfels.

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they can judge a situation intuitively and know if they should flee or if they can stay and check things out. If our energy is good, then they are good.”

I get the sense that Jodie and Keith are sizing us up as they choose a horse whose personality might complement our own. “That’s Abby,” says Keith, “a spirited little cutting horse we got down in Goliad. That paint horse is Pepper; she came here from East Texas. And this is Annie. She’s an old campaigner. We can put her with just about anyone.”

And so Annie goes with me. We groom our horses first, smoothing their lustrous coats with paddle brushes, making broad circles on their flanks, shoulders, and muscular necks. Annie seems to like it and whuffs her approval. We watch Jodie take his horse into the round pen and direct her around the space in a fluid movement that resembles a dance. When he holds his whip high to signal a higher energy, she

moves faster; when he trails it on the ground, she slows down. He makes subtle shifts in positioning and she changes direction. They are as in tune as musicians in a symphony.

“I won’t ever touch her. The whip is a way to project energy,” he says. “See that inside ear, focused on me? I’m going to ask her to walk now. Her head will lower, and she’s calm. Now, I’m going to ask her to come in to me. I take away all the pressure, all the focus.” He lowers the whip, and looks away. “Probably the hardest part of the whole exercise is patience,” he says.

I am not known for my patience. And so after a few awkward turns, after I finally gain confidence and Annie and I are gliding and turning in the ring, I ask her to come to me. I’m relieved when her ears relax and her head levels with her shoulders. “That’s where the expression ‘level-headed’ comes from,” offers Keith.



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And then Annie yawns.

“That’s a release of tension,” says Keith. “When we do round-pen work, there’s a certain amount of tension, because we’re taking the dominant role. When she yawns, she’s saying ‘I feel comfortable. I am releasing tension and I feel comfortable doing so.’”

And I wonder how much simpler human relationships might be if we felt tranquil being an open book. ★



Housed in a 4,000-square-foot brick building, The Pink Pistol is an explosion of sparkly, quirky fun that puts a boutique spin on Lambert’s rebellious and rocking style of country music.



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# The Shop That Miranda Built

MIRANDA LAMBERT’S PINK PISTOL BRINGS COUNTRY BLING TO LINDALE

text by Celestina Blok

“WELCOME TO LINDALE,” announces the vinyl billboard with a picture of a platinum blonde holding a guitar. “Hometown of Miranda Lambert.”

Located 13 miles north of Tyler, the East Texas town (population about 5,300) is our destination not for a potential glimpse of the country music superstar (we’d just seen her the night before during the Dallas stop of her “Certified Platinum” tour), but to visit The Pink Pistol, Lambert’s bling-filled boutique. We’re among the hundreds of visitors—many of them devoted “Ran fans”—who flock to town each week to check out



**THE PINK PISTOL** is at 100 E. Hubbard St. in Lindale. Open Mon-Sat 10-6, and Sun 12-6. Call 903/882-9305; [www.thepinkpistol.com](http://www.thepinkpistol.com).

Lambert’s retail spin on her rebellious and rocking style of country music.

Raised in a musical family in Lindale, the 32-year-old Lambert cut her musical teeth as a teenager in Texas before hitting it big in Nashville. She opened the Lindale shop in October 2013 after experiencing success with her original location in Tishomingo, Oklahoma, where she now lives with Blake Shelton, her country-crooning, TV-star husband. Both small towns have seen an increase in tourism and economic development thanks to Lambert’s fairy godmother-like



**An avid “junktiquer,” the singer makes regular trips to Round Top, Texas’ antiques capital, to search for weathered and worn finds to repurpose.**

magic wand of entrepreneurialism.

“The Pink Pistol has brought a big boost to our downtown area, just from the number of people who come here for that store,” says John Clary, president of the Lindale Economic Development Corp. “Some of them stay in our hotels, and some of them eat in our restaurants. The store has really perked up traffic and it’s been a good catalyst for new business.”

Housed in a 4,000-square-foot brick building adorned by a pink-and-white-striped awning, The Pink Pistol is an explosion of sparkly, quirky fun. Display tables at every turn bear kitschy gifts and knickknacks, like pink chrome flasks, cotton candy-scented candles, temporary tattoos, and dangly silver revolver earrings. Souvenir T-shirts and tank tops printed with the shop’s winged-revolver logo and the caption “for the wild at heart” hang on the walls, along with Polaroid snapshots of guests from far-away places—a nod to lyrics from Lambert’s song “Automatic,” which encourages picture-taking, “the kind you gotta shake.” A quick tour of the store, comprised of multiple rooms in a maze-like layout, reveals fashionable finds like embellished denim cut-off shorts, Aztec-print miniskirts, fringed handbags, sequined clutches, leather cuff bracelets, guitar-pick necklaces, and cowboy boots of all colors.

“I should get this one for my sister,” says my friend, holding up a white tank top with the words “Mama Tried” printed in black.

On this typical Friday afternoon, the store bustles with shoppers, including young couples, families with small children, girlfriend groups, and one sizable bachelorette party (identifiable by matching T-shirts and pink hair accessories). I overhear buzz about the previous night’s show.



#### FIND MORE ONLINE

TH interview with Miranda Lambert at [texashighways.com/detour](http://texashighways.com/detour).

“I loved her haircut,” says one woman.

“I hope they have that sparkly shirt she was wearing,” says another.

Located below a pink chandelier in the middle of the store, a small bar with pink glittery stools offers customers a chance to taste wines from Red 55 Winery, Lambert’s brand of wines named for her first pick-up truck—a candy-apple-red ’55 Chevy sidestep. Lambert’s parents, Rick and Bev, manage the winery, which produces and bottles the wine in Brownfield, a High Plains town near Lubbock. My pals and I sit down to participate in a tasting of all seven varietals, including whites and reds named after Lambert songs and

a blush called Electric Pink for her guitar.

“The most popular is probably Crazy Ex-Girlfriend,” says our server while filling small plastic sample cups with the sweet white table wine. My favorite is Kerosene, a straw-colored, dry and tart white wine named for Lambert’s first hit single.

“She comes in pretty regularly,” our server says when I ask about Lambert’s involvement in the store. “She likes to work on the window displays. A lot of times people don’t even notice when she’s here.”

Lambert’s decorative touches and love for antiques are apparent upon closer review of The Pink Pistol. An avid “junktiquer,” the singer makes regular trips to Round Top, Texas’ antiques capital, to search for weathered and worn finds to repurpose. Decor like classic toys, books, and a vintage mannequin head or two enhances the eccentric merchandising presentations throughout the store. Many wares are housed in antique suitcases and trunks or rustic armoires, some painted in shades of pink and turquoise. Vintage lace-up boots prop up the menu signage in the store’s coffee shop, which is located in a back room and keeps shoppers caffeinated with espresso, cappuccinos, and lattes.

Many of Lambert’s framed platinum and gold records, including best-selling singles like “White Liar” and chart-topping albums like “Four the Record,” hang along the pink-painted wall by a staircase that leads guests to a second story, which holds kids’ clothing, sale items, and Lindale Eagles T-shirts from the local high school. Guests often pose for snapshots in front of the awards, as well as outside under the entrance sign.

As we load up the car and head back west to Fort Worth, I admire my Pink Pistol souvenirs, including a pink tank top, a hot pink to-go cup for my coffee, and a pink candle in a mason jar. I’m not even a huge fan of the color pink, but I am a fan of Miranda. I guess there’s something about The Pink Pistol that makes one want to emulate Lambert’s small town-loving, wild-at-heart spirit—and her passion for pink. ★

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## Silver Wings

FROM SEWAGE TO AVIAN REFUGE  
AT MITCHELL LAKE AUDUBON CENTER

text by GENE FOWLER



### EGRET EYES

*Great egrets are a common sight at San Antonio's Mitchell Lake Audubon Center.*

Catering to birders, the refuge has a bird blind on its "bird pond" and clears brush in certain areas to create views of the basins and polders.

**S**ARA BEESLEY, DIRECTOR OF THE MITCHELL LAKE AUDUBON Center in San Antonio, thought she might have fallen prey to some strange trick when she first started working at the center two years ago and didn't see any American white pelicans for a few weeks. "After all," she explains, "the pelican is our signature bird, and Mitchell Lake is one of the few places in North America where you can see them year-round."

Beesley's first weeks were an anomaly, however, and her exploration of the refuge's lake, mudflats, and shallow wetlands soon coincided with the presence of the white pelicans, characterized by large throat pouches and long beaks. And when Beesley gave me a tour of the 1,200-acre preserve this summer, we saw dozens of the broad-winged birds, as well as neotropic cormorants, black-bellied whistling ducks, scissor-tailed flycatchers, and dickcissels.

"We are right along the central flyway, so we are a perfect stopover as birds migrate through," Beesley says. "We have a range of unique habitats so we attract all types of birds—we have uplands, ponds, wetlands, and brushlands. We also get lots of coastal birds. Birders come here from all over the world."

When you visit Mitchell Lake, stop first at the visitor center to register, pay the \$5 entry fee, and pick up a loaner pair of binoculars and a map. The center is in the 1910 Leeper House, the former home of the McNay Art Museum's first director, John Leeper; the building was moved from the museum grounds to Mitchell Lake in 2003. The home's broad porches with overhead fans offer a relaxing place



**MITCHELL LAKE AUDUBON CENTER**

is at 10750 Pleasanton Road, about 10 miles south of downtown San Antonio. Hours are 8-4 Tue-Sun. Entry costs \$5; \$2 for children 6-16. Call 210/628-1639; mitchelllake.audubon.org.

to gaze at the surrounding xeriscaped gardens and their frequent butterfly and hummingbird visitors, and to study the list of birds that have been spotted at the refuge.

"We create habitat through 'wild-scaping' with drought-tolerant plants," Beesley says, listing examples such as native lantana, pink skullcap, and blue mistflower.

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center offers about two miles of walking trails through its 385 acres of upland habitat—thorny South Texas Brush Country with thickets of oak, mesquite, huisache, and prickly pear. There are also five-and-a-half miles of roads that visitors can drive or hike among the refuge's 215 acres of wetlands and ponds, and along the shore of the 600-acre lake. Catering to birders, the refuge has a bird blind on its "bird pond" and clears brush in certain areas to create views of the basins and polders.

While there are plenty of birds in the upland habitat, the majority of the action is typically at the lake and the wetlands. The center offers guided birding tours each week (normally on Sundays). A tour this summer recorded 53 species, including a great blue heron, six black-bellied whistling ducks, and eight painted buntings. In the late summer, shorebirds like black-necked stilts, American avocets, sandpipers, herons, and egrets flock to the refuge's wetlands; in the winter, ducks are the most common sight, including northern shovelers, blue-winged teals, and hooded mergansers.

With its mission to connect people to nature through conservation and education focused on birds and bird habitat, the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center hosts some 4,000 schoolchildren for camps and field trips each year. "Kids don't spend as much time outside these days and have less opportunity to experience nature," says Danielle Ormon, a spokeswoman for Audubon Texas. "When kids touch and feel nature, hold it up close, the experience sticks with them



PHOTO: Michael Amador

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and they in turn teach their parents.”

The center also offers opportunities for older children and adults to participate in “citizen science” data collection projects, such as a recent Frog Watch. Participants memorized the sounds of various frog calls and then identified eight separate species in the preserve, from small Blanchard’s cricket frogs to

large Gulf Coast toads. This fall, citizen scientists will look for the endangered Texas horned lizard.

Formed thousands of years ago through natural drainage, Mitchell Lake has always been a magnet for migratory birds. Native Americans likely camped at the site, and given the lake’s proximity to San Francisco de

la Espada Mission (about three miles away), the missionaries probably relied on the lake to water their livestock. Early maps identified the lake as *Laguna de los Patos* (Lake of the Ducks), and it was a popular site for duck hunting and bird watching in the 19th Century. The lake takes its name from Asa Mitchell, a veteran of the Battle of San Jacinto, who bought the lake and surrounding acreage in 1839.



**HOOT & HARVEST FESTIVAL**

The center hosts its annual Hoot & Harvest Festival on October 17 with a native plant sale, butterfly walks, nature displays, hayrides, and arts and crafts. The Last Chance Forever Bird of Prey Conservancy will be on hand with golden eagles, hawks, and owls.

In the early 20th Century, San Antonio enlarged the lake with a dam and began piping its sewage there, at first untreated sewage, and then after 1930, treated wastewater. While that may sound unpleasant, landfills and sewage treatment plants attract a diversity of winged creatures and are often popular with birders. Regardless, don’t let the site’s distant past dissuade you from a visit today. The Texas Legislature decreed that the lake no longer be used for wastewater treatment in 1972, and the San Antonio City Council declared it a bird refuge in 1973. The National Audubon Society took over management of the site in 2004.

Retired biologist Ruth Lofgren, 98, worked with the League of Women Voters to help resurrect the lake from a sewage swamp into a wildlife center—a transformation she calls a “miracle.” “It’s wonderful for people, especially children, to have an opportunity to get acquainted with nature,” Lofgren says. “I just love seeing a thousand pelicans swoop from one area of the wetlands to another. It provides such a soothing experience in a person’s life.” ★



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*Dance-Hall Dude*

KEVIN FOWLER ON HIS FAVORITE TEXAS DANCE HALLS

text by John Morthland

**K**EVIN FOWLER GOES FOR A GOOD love song as much as the next red-blooded country music singer-songwriter, but you need only look at his song titles to understand the brand of country he likes best: “Beer, Bait and Ammo,” “Loose, Loud and Crazy,” “Girl in a Truck.” Fowler has made his name in the contemporary sub-genre known as Texas Country with catchy, good-timin’ anthems that celebrate huntin’ and fishin’, country girls, and cold beer.

A native of Amarillo, Fowler studied guitar and songwriting on the West Coast before arriving in Austin in 1991. He first played guitar in the popular hard-rock band Dangerous

**Dance halls remain close to Fowler’s heart—so much so that he does an annual statewide tour, from Thanksgiving weekend through New Year’s Eve, called “Deck the Dancehalls.”**

Toys, then fronted his own Southern-rock group Thunderfoot. But in 1998, he returned to the country music he’d grown up with, which he plays with a rock edge.

While Fowler is in high demand these days on the fair-and-festival circuit, he developed his country career in the legendary dance halls of Central and South Texas. Rural Texas towns once revolved around these halls, with their clapboard-and-corrugated-tin construction, friendly old-timers, Spartan furnishings, and wooden dance



Albert Dance Hall in Stonewall

**“I’ve played all over the world, and I’ve seen no place on the planet that has a dance-hall scene like we have here.”**

floors that shine like military uniform buttons on inspection day. Dance halls remain close to Fowler’s heart—so much so that he does an annual state-wide tour, from Thanksgiving weekend through New Year’s Eve, called “Deck the Dancehalls,” during which he plays as many of them as he can. (Dates for 2015 were pending at press time.)

“All the historic dance halls offer the same experience, and that’s the cool thing about them; they’re a step back in time,” he says. “I’ve played all over the world, and I’ve seen no place on the planet that has a dance-hall scene like we have here.”

Asked to give the lowdown on his favorites, Fowler invited me to Rustic Ranch, his spread outside of Wimberley where he’s collected and restored several historic buildings. So, we conducted the interview in ... Fowler’s dance hall.

**Schroeder Hall, Goliad County (est. 1890)**

“This place just reeks of history and

tradition,” Fowler says. “You look at the photographs on the wall and everyone’s played there: Hank Thompson, you name ‘em; you feel like you’re part of country music royalty. They have one of the best dance floors in the state, and they take good care of it.” [www.schroederdancehall.com](http://www.schroederdancehall.com).

**Old Coupland Inn and Dancehall, Coupland (est. 1992 as a dance hall; originally built in 1904 as the town drugstore)**

“This one has the restaurant and the old hotel,” Fowler says. “You go into that hotel and it’s really cool; everything there is still specific to the old days. People come to dance and drink beer, but it’s multi-generational, everyone from the kids to grandma and grandpa, eight to 80. Coupland was probably the first place I saw little kids sleeping on the tables and benches when it got late, but as I learned, it’s like that at all the dance halls.” [www.couplanddancehall.com](http://www.couplanddancehall.com).

**Albert Dance Hall, Stonewall (est. 1922)**

“The Easley family bought this about five years ago, and they did a great job restoring the dance hall without hurting the feel of the place; the floor is incredible. The general store is still there, too, only now it’s more like an icehouse. Every time we’ve been to Albert it’s always been full, and there’ll be a lot of people hanging around outside as well, under these big old live oaks. They don’t do as many public dances as they used to, but they do a lot of weddings there now.” [www.alberttexas.com](http://www.alberttexas.com).

**Anhalt Hall, Spring Branch in Comal County (est. 1887)**

“You talk about history and nostalgia, this one started out in the 19th Century as a meeting hall, and it’s still going strong as the community center,” Fowler says. “The dance floor is dark oak and it’s huge. No tables around the dance floor, just benches. They’ve got high ceilings, arched beams, and some

of the coolest woodwork you’ve ever seen, and they’ve still got polka bands and country bands playing there regularly.” [www.anhalhall.com](http://www.anhalhall.com).

**Quihi Gun Club & Dance Hall, Quihi (est. 1890)**

“I’ve never played this one, but I was there for a friend’s wedding recently and it is great. It’s near Castroville, at the end of a little road that was still dirt until just a couple years ago,” Fowler says. “The road is lined with all these tall trees so it’s dark even in the daytime, and when you get back there the dance hall is this big, corrugated tin barn, way up off the ground on these six-foot cedar posts, because the hall stretches way out over the creek, and it floods there a lot. It’s run by a committee, by members who put in the money and effort to keep it going for future generations. They have two public dances per month, and the rest of the time they rent it out for special occasions. It’s just a great room; I’ve got a true soft spot for that place.” [www.quihidancehall.com](http://www.quihidancehall.com).

**Swiss Alp Dancehall, Swiss Alp (est. 1900)**

“Oh, man, it is so rustic here, I just love the Swiss Alp, right there on Highway 77 near Schulenburg. It’s all old barn wood and rusty tin, just a barn, really,” Fowler says. “But the dance floor is swirling, and the place has such a great feel; if you spill your beer in there nobody’s gonna complain, let’s put it that way. I figured out early on when I started playing the dance halls, you just have to play music that’ll keep ‘em drinking beer and dancing, and if you do that everything’ll be fine.” [www.swissalptexas.com](http://www.swissalptexas.com). ★

**UPCOMING SHOWS**

For more info on Kevin Fowler, check out [www.kevinfowler.com](http://www.kevinfowler.com). Upcoming Fowler concerts include the Colorado County Fair on September 26, the Texas Rice Festival on September 30, and the State Fair of Texas on October 10.

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Photo by Diann Boyes



# Textile Style

WOOLEN ACCESSORIES HANDWOVEN IN PAINT ROCK

text by **Melissa Gaskill**

**A** SMALL BELL TINKLES AS I PUSH open the door and enter the store, worn wooden floorboards creaking beneath my feet. A tall ceiling soars overhead, and dust motes dance in the light streaming through large windows as I walk between stacks of rugs. I flip through the variety of patterns and muted shades, then run my fingers across several thick, colorful saddle blankets draped across a rack. On a shelf nearby, a pile of brightly striped placemats (\$15-\$30) catches my eye, and I know I've found my Paint Rock souvenir.

This tiny town, about 30 miles due east of San Angelo, owes its name to an impressive collection of rock pictographs on a

**Concho County once ranked as the nation's leading sheep-producing county, and many people in the area still raise sheep for wool and Angora goats for hair.**

bluff near the Concho River. Early artists created pictographs by applying minerals and dyes to rock, most commonly with their fingers but sometimes with brushes made of animal or plant fiber.

Tours of these paintings, located on the private Campbell Ranch, are one of the area's main tourist attractions and the reason for my visit. At my appointed time (reservations are a must), Kay Campbell meets me in the visitor center, where stacks of photos and drawings and chunks of rock cover several tables. Campbell grew up on this land, which

her grandfather D.E. Sims purchased in 1870, primarily because he wanted to preserve the rock art. She explains that the paintings span thousands of years and multiple native peoples. While we can (and do) speculate what they mean, no one knows for sure. Then we hop in her car and drive down to the bluff.

About 70 feet high and several hundred yards long, this bluff of limestone boulders and cacti contains more than 1,000 images. I easily pick out geometric designs, along with images that look like canoes, stick figures, and hands, some of the latter reminding me of the palm outlines my children once brought home from school. With Campbell's guidance, I also see an hourglass, what looks like an old Spanish-style church, a stalk of corn, a bison, a roadrunner, and a bird that could be a turkey. Tally marks line one surface, as if ancient visitors kept track of time spent here. Some paintings have faded, but others, protected by



**INGRID'S CUSTOM HAND-WOVEN RUGS**

is at 141 S. Roberts (US 83) in Paint Rock. With advance notice, you can tour the factory and watch employees spin, weave, and finish items. Call 325/732-4370. To arrange to see the rock art, call 325/732-4376.

overhangs of rock, remain clear. I want to hug Campbell and thank her and her family for keeping them safe.

Back at the visitor center, I admire a rug on the floor and am thrilled when Campbell says it was made right here in Paint Rock. The shop, she tells me, is catty-corner from Paint Rock's circa-1886 courthouse, a two-story stone structure topped with a red roof. Sure enough, when I drive back to the town, I notice the sign: "Ingrid's Hand-Woven Rugs."

Native Austrian Reinhard Schoff-

thaler bought this shop in 1981 from his cousins Ingrid and Leo Haas, who started the operation in 1979. Schooled in Austria as a chef, Schoffthaler came to the United States in 1969 to learn English. He opened a restaurant in New York, but quickly discovered that that career wasn't compatible with raising his daughter. So, when the shop became available, he decided to move to Texas.

Ingrid and Leo stayed on for two years, teaching their cousin the business. At the time, the shop ran five looms; since then, a local craftsman has built eight more.

At first, weavers worked exclusively with sheep wool and goat mohair, most of it from nearby ranches. Concho County once ranked as the nation's leading sheep-producing county, and many people in the area still raise sheep for wool and Angora goats for hair. But, Schoffthaler says, those fibers have a soft texture, and coarse



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fiber makes better rugs. He began ordering coarse fiber from New Zealand, and then about 10 years ago, he received a call from Dan and Dale Goodyear, who raise alpacas in Pennsylvania. “They heard about us from the Texas Tech University International Textile Center, where we used to have our fiber dyed,” Schoffthaler recalls. The Goodyears sent a few pounds of their alpaca fiber to the Paint Rock shop, and the weavers succeeded in working with it and sent the resulting textiles back to the Goodyears to sell. “Then it snowballed, because people raising alpacas all know each other and they spread the word,” says Schoffthaler.

As a result, the shop now works with fiber from across the country and Canada, including about 30 suppliers in Texas, creating rugs and other items from goat, alpaca, llama, yak, and even bison hair.

Alpaca remains Schoffthaler’s

favorite. “It’s a great fiber,” he says. “A pair of alpaca socks is very warm and causes no allergies because there is no lanolin. For rugs, we use a coarser grade that is very sturdy.” For saddle blankets, the weavers use slightly thicker wool, which makes the pads very durable, and very popular. “People always reorder our horse blankets,” he says.

**The shop works with fiber from across the country and Canada, including about 30 suppliers in Texas, creating rugs and other items from goat, alpaca, llama, yak, and even bison hair.**

Fiber arrives at the shop in raw form—looking as if it just came off of its original owner, albeit perhaps a bit cleaner—and is corded and spun around a jute core. That makes it durable and reversible. It takes roughly 20 pounds of

fiber to produce a six-by-nine-foot rug.

These days, the shop makes the rugs, and its 1,600 or so fiber suppliers sell them. (Schoffthaler is happy to share contact numbers.) Current orders will keep the Paint Rock looms busy for the next three to four months. As a result, Schoffthaler does no marketing and keeps only a small inventory at the store, which opens Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. While you can still walk in and order a custom rug, he says, you’ll have to wait awhile to receive it.

The looms can produce a rug up to 12 feet wide and any length. Saddle blankets and placemats are created in the same manner as the rugs and on the same looms, only on a smaller scale, of course.

Back home, my colorful striped placemats brighten my table, reminding me at every meal of a quiet Texas town, a cliff covered in mysterious images, and a family dedicated to preserving them. ★



**MADE FOR LISTENING**  
Singer-songwriters Susan Gibson (playing the guitar) and Elizabeth Wills mesmerize the crowd at The Bugle Boy at an intimate July concert.

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## Now Hear This!

A FORMER ARMY BARRACK PROVIDES SWEET HARMONY IN LA GRANGE

text by Roger Wood

**I**N A MODEST SPACE THAT DOUBLES AS AN office and the green room for performers, singer-songwriter Sara Hickman relaxes momentarily and reflects. “There’s a lot of love invested in this place, and it makes what I do exquisite,” she says. As an acclaimed recording and touring artist, this 2010-2011 “Official State Musician of Texas” has played prominent concert halls nationwide. Yet here, minutes before gracing the little stage beyond the door, Hickman professes high praise for The Bugle Boy, an acoustically pristine listening room in La Grange.

“There’s this camaraderie among all the folks here,” she explains. “You’re in this old wooden building, and the sound is so beautiful, and the people are attuned, and it’s all about the music. Being in this place makes me happy that I chose to be a songwriter.”

Specializing in the eclectic blend of musical styles commonly dubbed “Americana,” this 80-seat venue has hosted

**“The connection that this environment allows, between the artist and the audience, is so visceral and so important.”**

approximately 110 shows annually since 2005. “We like real, soulful, honest music performed by the person who composed it,” says Lane Gosnay, the founder and executive director. “We value that form of expression, that art.”

Though not located in a big city, The Bugle Boy attracts big talent—thanks to that reverence for song. Most of those are Texas-based artists, such as Hickman, Joe Ely, Ruthie Foster, Marcia Ball, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Shinyribs, and many others. But the booking also regularly includes luminaries from beyond the Lone Star State, such as Janis Ian, A.J. Croce, and Greg Trooper.

Staffed primarily with volunteers, this grassroots enterprise opens for only



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**THE BUGLE BOY** is at 1051 N. Jefferson (TX 77) in La Grange. For information about the listening room, the Soldier Songs and Voices program, Swan Songs, the Talent Trust scholarship, community outreach programs, and upcoming concerts, call 979/968-9944; [www.thebugleboy.org](http://www.thebugleboy.org).

three hours per event, usually on Fridays and Saturdays, with concerts ending at 10 p.m. Although beer and wine (as well as soft drinks and snacks) are sold before shows and during intermissions, The Bugle Boy de-emphasizes alcohol consumption as a business model. It also expects audience members to be respectfully unobtrusive during songs: no chatter, disruptions with food or drink, or cell phones. Indeed, a large sign near the main entrance advises, "QUIET PLEASE. LOOSE LIPS SINK SHIPS!"

That allusion to wartime history fits the 70-plus-year-old building that houses The Bugle Boy, which takes its name from a 1941 hit song. The simple rectangular structure originated as a U.S. Army barrack at Camp Swift, near Bastrop, during World War II. Then in 1948 the Sons of Hermann Lodge purchased it and moved it to the current location to be a meeting hall. Fifty-six years later it changed hands again when Gosnay and friends brought The Bugle Boy into being. While those three incarnations might seem unrelated, this timeworn edifice has consistently united individuals sharing common bonds—military, fraternal, or musical.

Today a friendly sense of mission

prevails among staffers and supporters at this haven for songwriters. "The connection that this environment allows, between the artist and the audience, is so visceral and so important," says Gosnay. She credits the commitment of local aficionados who have embraced and nourished her original vision. "People started showing up and volunteering. They adopted this place as something that mattered to them."

According to Heather Eilers, the community outreach and volunteer coordinator, "It sort of happens organically with folks that are fans of this music. They come to shows, observe how we operate, and ask how to volunteer."

That same spirit extends to multiple community service programs maintained by The Bugle Boy Foundation, a nonprofit organization since 2008. The president emeritus of the board, David Vogel, notes, "Music is the draw that gets people here, but it's about more than just the concerts. We have really gotten involved in helping people, and we've become a community asset."

One example is the Soldier Songs and Voices program, exclusively for U.S. Armed Services veterans. Two Sundays per month it utilizes the venue for

songwriting and guitar-playing workshops that promote musical expression as therapy. Another effort is Music and Memory, which, Gosnay explains, "creates personalized playlists on iPods provided to nursing home residents, especially people with dementia and those who are withdrawn." There are also separate programs to assist selected artists with financing recording productions, to present music education sessions in public schools, and to archive documentary material at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas.

Meanwhile, now seated on the stage, Sara Hickman cradles an acoustic guitar and sings, accompanied only by Kristen DeWitt on harmony vocals. On the final chorus, the two women lean toward each other, their voices blending into a breathtaking moment of sonic beauty.

On the rear wall to their right, a small placard with hand-drawn lettering urges, "Believe in the Magic." That simple imperative perhaps succinctly explains the phenomenon that is The Bugle Boy, a place where believers—producers, performers, and patrons—nurture their faith in the power of communion through music. ★

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