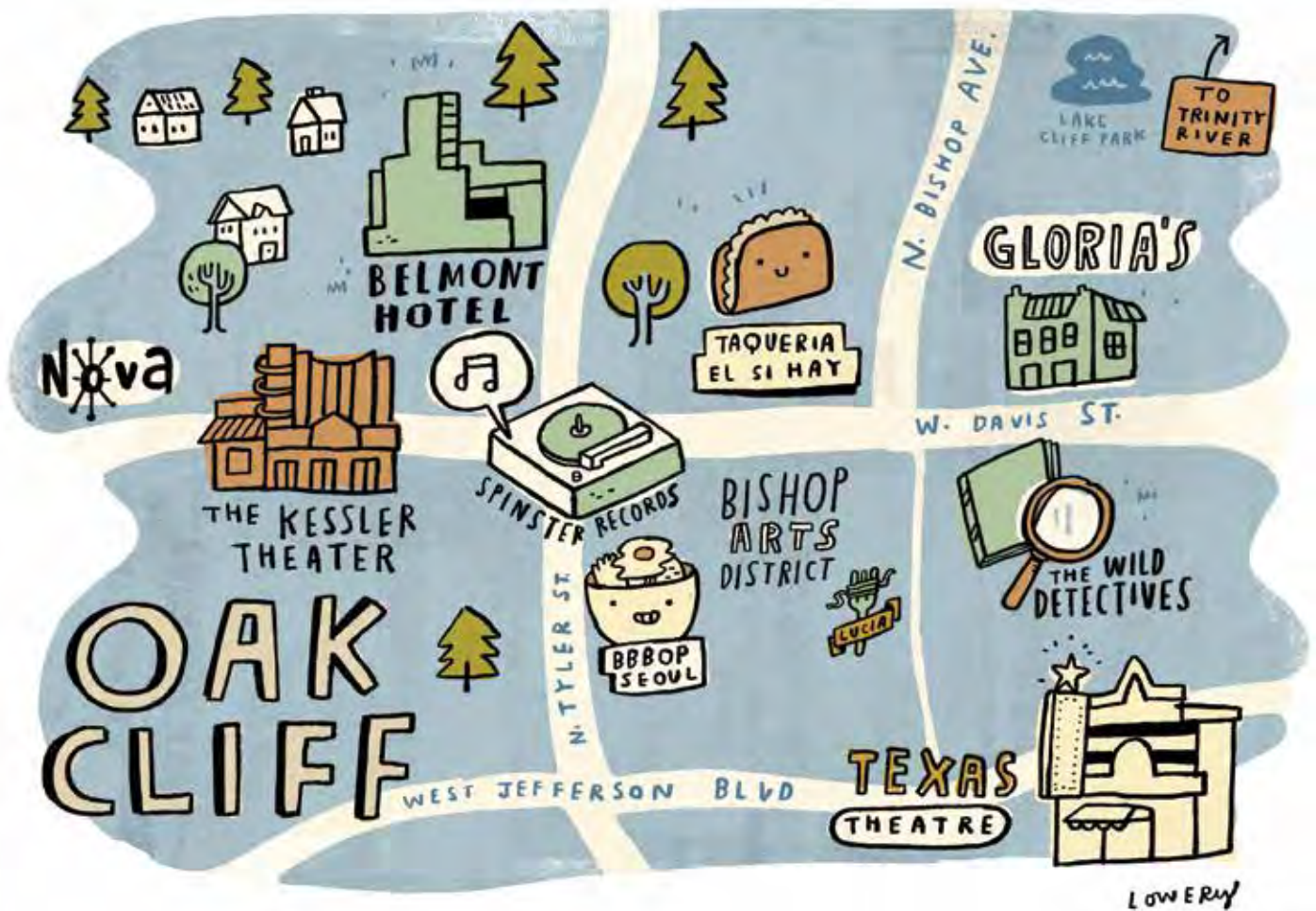


# HIT THE ROAD

CAN'T-MISS GETAWAYS



DESTINATION: OAK CLIFF



## The Brooklyn of Texas

Experience another side of Dallas in Oak Cliff

story by **Michael Corcoran**

**IT'S NOT A SUBURB, BUT A BOROUGH. NOT AN** extension, but a separate township, at least spiritually. Although Dallas annexed Oak Cliff in 1903, the 87-square-mile area southwest of downtown has maintained its own identity. If Dallas is the packed dance floor under a disco ball, then Oak Cliff is the mysterious couple at the dark end of the bar playing footsie.

Framed by beautiful rolling hills, Oak Cliff celebrates independence, diversity, and creativity. It's Berkeley without the big college, Brooklyn sans subway. Just a 10-minute drive from downtown Dallas, Oak Cliff offers a convenient day trip for residents of



- **Fort Worth**  
35 minutes
- **Wichita Falls**  
2.25 hours
- **Austin**  
3 hours
- **Houston**  
4 hours

the Dallas-Fort Worth area. But Oak Cliff has also been drawing visitors from all over the state in recent years.

They drive for hours to see musicians Michael Nesmith or St. Vincent in the intimately restored, art deco Kessler Theater. Or, they visit to catch a comedy revue or offbeat film at the notorious Texas Theatre, now known more for its adventurous arts programming than as the site of JFK assassin Lee Harvey Oswald's arrest. It used to be that folks only came to the edgy Cliff to visit the Dallas Zoo or to chase Oswald's ghost, but now the curious are lured by chic eateries, interesting shopping, and

craft coffee and cocktail hangouts.

Maybe visitors will want to follow in the footsteps of Beyoncé and Jay-Z to upscale coastal Mexican restaurant Mesa on West Jefferson Boulevard, where the music moguls ordered lobster enchiladas and chicken mole; try the upscale barbecue of Smoke, with dishes like beer-can chicken and coffee-cured brisket; or brunch on chicken and waffles with coffee or a mimosa at Oddfellows. It's possible to spend a few days in Oak Cliff without ever going into Dallas proper, whose skyline provides a spectacular view to the north. To paraphrase a lyric from Jimmie Dale Gilmore, have you ever seen Dallas from the pool of the Belmont Hotel?

"You just get this good feeling when you're crossing the Trinity River," says David Grover, a longtime Los Angeles

musician who opened Spinster, a "vinyl record lifestyle store," on West Davis Street in 2014. "Oak Cliff is special. It's a mom n' pop vibe in a big city."

**"Where else but Oak Cliff can you find a fine dining restaurant next to a car wash?"**

Oak Cliff's restaurant scene is especially fluent in entrepreneurship. "Oak Cliff is a place where you can test a business concept or buy your first home at very little risk," adds Paul Wilkes, who owns the Glass Optical eyewear boutique, while his wife, Megan, co-owns Emporium Pies.

In just a five-block stretch of West Davis Street, the main drag, your dining options include Cuban sandwiches

at C. Señor, Korean fried chicken at bbbop Seoul Kitchen, gourmet flatbreads and steaks at Bolsa, fancy home-cooking at Pink Magnolia, El Salvadoran cuisine at Gloria's, or the best \$1.35 tacos in the world at Taqueria El Si Hay. Go farther west on Davis, just past the Kessler, and you'll find Nova, a neighborhood restaurant and bar set in an old Dairy Queen building that busts hunger with a chicken-fried pork loin (\$18) covered in spicy sausage gravy and served with mashed potatoes.

"Where else but Oak Cliff can you find a fine dining restaurant next to a car wash?" Wilkes poses, referencing the dual character of the historic neighborhood. Rare is the trendy area that has so many working-class residents. The gentry have arrived and real estate costs have risen, but the cultural air

remains scented with grilled peppers and onions, girded by the rumbling bass lines of hip hop and salsa.

Oak Cliff likes it funky and original. "If you're not into the malls and the chain stores, Oak Cliff is for you," says Grover, who hosts live music at Spinster two to three times per week. Instead of Barnes & Noble, there's The Wild Detectives, a bookstore that serves food and drinks, shows art films, and hosts live music. And why go to Starbucks when you can get fresh-roasted coffee at Davis Street Espresso, which serves an amazing "house toast" with avocado, tomato, and ricotta?

Another Oak Cliff original is the Belmont Hotel, which was the first non-Californian motor court motel west of the Mississippi when it opened in 1946. Restored in 2005, the Belmont is more like Oak Cliff's Chateau Marmont because like that Hollywood hotel, the Belmont is a place to start the night. Bar Belmont, off the lobby and outside, overlooks the sparkling promises of a city in wait.

"We've kept the motor court aesthetic, but we've modernized it for the new type of traveler," says Jordan Ford, part of an investment group that bought the Belmont in 2015. "You walk

out of your room to open space. It's a campus with room to roam."

The artist-in-residence at the Belmont is tough-and-tender songsmith Alejandro Escovedo, who curates a series of music performances in the lobby and is developing a podcast from the Belmont consisting of interviews with songwriters. "I loved my time in Austin, but there's no place like Oak Cliff," says Escovedo, who lives in the Belmont when he's not on the road. "People come here to get things done. It's not all talk."

The 2012 opening of the soaring Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, whose span resembles the world's largest butterfly net, helped spur the Oak Cliff renaissance, providing a new gateway to the area. Running parallel is the Ronald Kirk Bridge (formerly the Continental Bridge), which was built for cars but recently converted into a pedestrian walkway. Hike-and-bike trails continue along the banks of the Trinity.

If Oak Cliff had a chip on its shoulder for not being on the ritzier side of the Trinity, it's been whittled by artisans and now sits in a storefront window of a trendy shop on Bishop Avenue. Oak Cliff's revitalization in the early 2000s originated in the Bishop Arts District, a four-square-block area that's now home to more than 50 small businesses. The district fills on the weekends with North Dallasites, who come for brunch at classic French bistro Boulevardier or, if they've made reservations a month earlier, at the tiny Lucia, regarded by foodies as the best Italian restaurant in North Texas. Eno's Pizza Tavern and Hunky's Hamburgers are more casual faves.

A friend from Dallas derides Oak Cliff as "the new Disneyland for hipsters," but Jeff Liles, the longtime Dallas music scenester who has booked



**OAK CLIFF**  
is southwest of downtown Dallas. Visitor info is available from the Dallas CVB, [www.visitdallas.com](http://www.visitdallas.com), the Bishop Arts District Merchant Association, [www.bishopartsdistrict.com](http://www.bishopartsdistrict.com), and the Oak Cliff Chamber of Commerce, [www.oakcliffchamber.org](http://www.oakcliffchamber.org).

the Kessler since its 2010 rebirth, says the Cliff is "hipster proof." Yes, there are tourists, many of whom have beards and every Bon Iver record, but Liles argues that the neighborhood maintains "a large ethnic influence that inspires its creative class." Grover notes the high stroller count and says, "Our hipsters have kids. It's an older crowd." You turn in your hipster card the first time you buy diapers at midnight.

Oak Cliff has only recently become hip, but it's always been cool. These are the old stomping grounds of Bonnie and Clyde, and the home of both the nation's first drive-in restaurant (Pig Stand in 1921) and convenience store (Tote'm, later renamed 7-11, in 1927). Before he became the first person to play blues on an electric guitar, T-Bone Walker recorded as Oak Cliff T-Bone in 1929, when he was still shining shoes at Stevens Park Golf Course. Two of his disciples, Jimmie and Stevie Ray Vaughan, also grew up in the Cliff, though a couple of decades later. Adamson High, where country legend Ray Price began singing, later spawned "outlaw country" forbearers B.W. Stevenson, Michael Martin Murphey, and Ray Wylie Hubbard. New Bohemians singer Edie Brickell named her 1990 song "Oak Cliff Bra," after her hometown.

Oak Cliff is still a bit like a Tex-Mex Chinatown; nothing would really shock you here. Not even seeing the future Mrs. Paul Simon sitting on the front porch in her bra, watching the world go by. You can be yourself in the Cliff. Maybe that's what her song is about.

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**  
David Grover of Spinster Records, Texas Theatre's neon sign, Davis Street Espresso, C. Señor, The Wild Detectives bookshop, strolling Bishop Avenue in the Bishop Arts District.



Photos: © Robert Hart



**MARDI GRAS**  
Oak Cliff hosts DFW's biggest Mardi Gras parade Feb. 26. Learn more at [www.mardigrasoakcliff.com](http://www.mardigrasoakcliff.com).



# BALLAST OF THE BEAT

LONGTIME AUSTIN CLUBS  
NURTURE THE CITY'S  
LIVE MUSIC CULTURE

STORY BY  
MICHAEL CORCORAN  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
TIFFANY HOFELDT

**T**he Old Austin crowd loves to reminisce about all-night jam sessions with Stevie Ray Vaughan and the lost progressive-country paradise of the Armadillo World Headquarters. Listening to “Austalgists,” it might sound like all the great clubs closed long ago.

But on any night of the week, venues across Austin keep the beat going with bands playing the best of Texas music of all genres—from country to jazz and conjunto to punk. At least 16 of these clubs have been open for 16 years or more. Few cities in the world can match that claim. In club years, 16 is about 87.

It’s true that such beloved clubs as Liberty Lunch and Flipnotics have fallen victim to soaring real-estate values, but new ones take up the slack, praying to break even. And hot new acts like A Giant Dog, Walker Lukens, Tameca Jones, and Moving Panoramas reinforce the “Live Music Capital of the World’s” independent-music prominence.

It makes no financial sense to open a venue for live original music, considering the overhead of installing a stage and sound equipment, then hiring a band, soundman, and bouncers each night. The rock-and-roll crowd is getting old, and the kids want to watch Netflix or roll to laptop disco. A smarter investment would be a cocktail lounge. Or an emu farm.

Nevertheless, the energy of regularly hosting mini-concerts hooks certain people. The plot changes every night. “On a good night, when the band’s great and the folks are totally into it, you feel like, ‘Wow, I’m the nerd from high school and I did this,’” said Randall Stockton, who opened Beerland on Red River Street in 2001.

As Austin is becoming more like Dallas and Houston, one thing that distinguishes the Texas capital’s quality of life is the live-music scene. The almighty South by Southwest conference, which makes Austin the capital of the new world each mid-March, was built on the backs of Austin clubs. They are to Austin what the missions are to San Antonio, though these venues are not physically impressive. In fact, most are dumps. But you don’t go to a music venue because of how it looks from the street. And when the band’s really great, it doesn’t matter that the wall you’re leaning against is painted plywood. You pay your cover (which is usually low in Austin) because you’re chasing magic. It doesn’t always happen, but you don’t want to be home watching *Big Bang Theory* when it does.

The only true motivation for opening a live music venue is a passion for the music and community around it. That’s the characteristic that ties these clubs together, as well as newer clubs that will someday be legends, such as the Mohawk, Hotel Vegas, White Horse Saloon, Parish, and C-Boy’s. Live music clubs are the heart and soul of Austin.



### CACTUS CAFE

opened 1979

Some folks like their music loud or danceable, but the Cactus serves those who want to hear words elevated by melody. Located in the Texas Union building at the University of Texas—in the same space where Janis Joplin got her start, then a café called the Chuck Wagon—the Cactus sets the “listening room” standard in town. Legendary songwriters like Townes Van Zandt, Lyle Lovett, and Nanci Griffith favored the Cactus when they were starting out. Now the club hosts younger artists who look up to that group, along with intimate shows by influential veterans. **2247 Guadalupe St.** [www.cactuscafe.org](http://www.cactuscafe.org)

### FLAMINGO CANTINA »

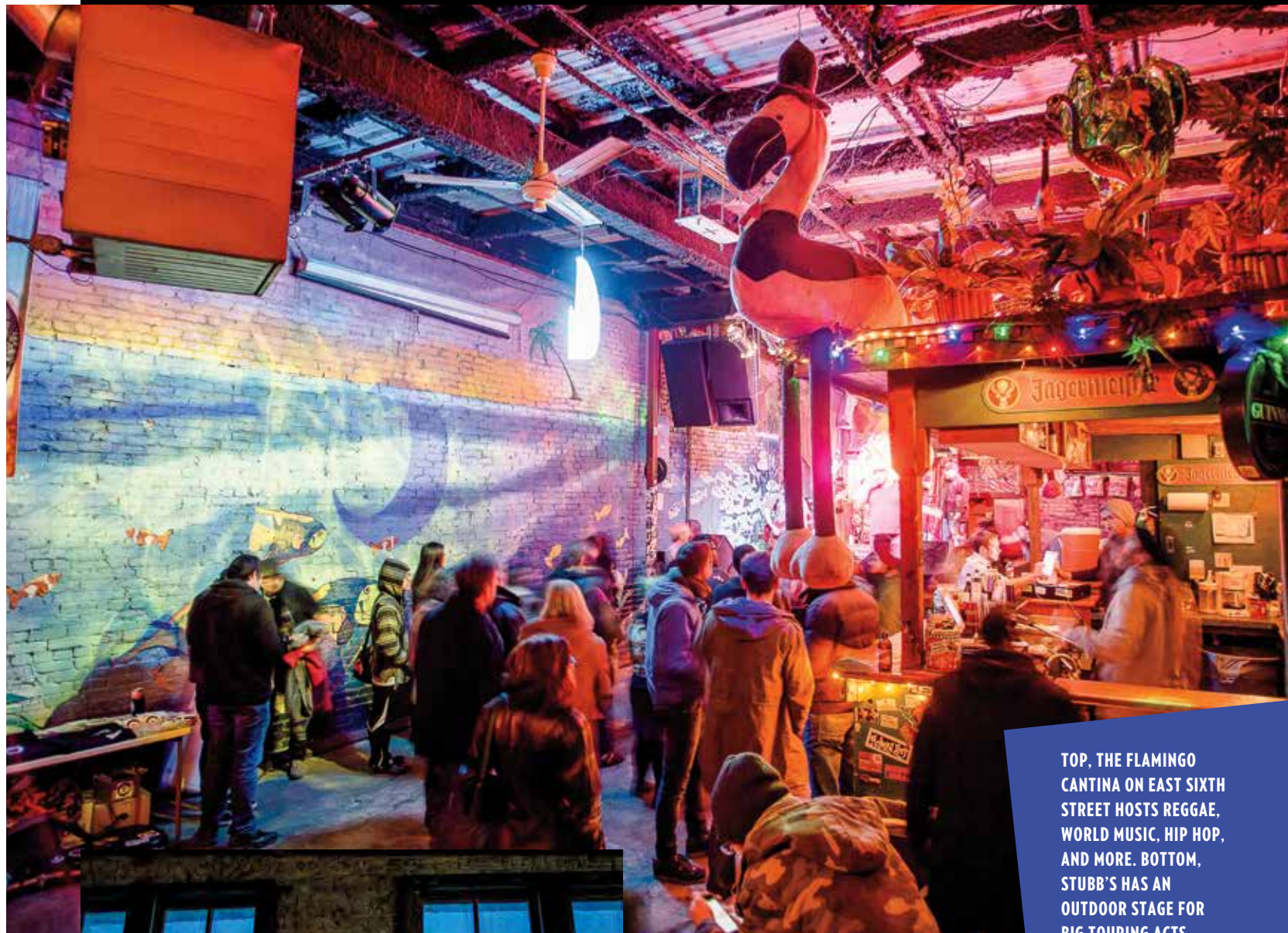
opened 1991

This Sixth Street club is known for Jah-dropping reggae, ska, worldbeat, and Latin music. It’s all for the love of irie, so it’s where Jamaican dub legend Lee Scratch Perry plays, even though he could fill bigger rooms. The Cantina is a tiny place, but tiered benches provide good sightlines, and there’s a rooftop deck. **515 E. Sixth St.** [www.flamingocantina.com](http://www.flamingocantina.com)

### STUBB’S »

opened 1996

The Fugees played the weekend this barbecue restaurant opened its 2,100-capacity stage along Waller Creek. And Stubb’s has continued to draw staggering talent. Iggy and the Stooges, the Pixies, Merle Haggard, White Stripes, Loretta Lynn—you get the idea. There’s also an inside stage mostly for local bands and the very popular Sunday Gospel Brunch. **801 Red River St.** [www.stubbsaustin.com](http://www.stubbsaustin.com)



TOP, THE FLAMINGO CANTINA ON EAST SIXTH STREET HOSTS REGGAE, WORLD MUSIC, HIP HOP, AND MORE. BOTTOM, STUBB’S HAS AN OUTDOOR STAGE FOR BIG TOURING ACTS AND AN INDOOR STAGE FOR SMALLER SHOWS.





TOP, CAMPY DECOR GIVES THE CAROUSEL LOUNGE A TRAVELING CIRCUS VIBE. BOTTOM LEFT, ANTONE'S IS BEST KNOWN FOR THE BLUES. BOTTOM RIGHT, TWO-STEPPING IS A FINE TRADITION AT THE LITTLE LONGHORN.

**CAROUSEL LOUNGE** «

opened 1963

It's hard not to think about the "Pink Elephants On Parade" scene from Dumbo when you're at this ultra-campy, circus-themed dive bar. With an old wooden phone booth inside and crazy clown and elephant art, the Carousel is always the headliner, no matter who's on stage—usually four-piece rock bands on the weekends.

**1110 E. 52nd St.**

[www.carouselounge.net](http://www.carouselounge.net)

**HOLE IN THE WALL**

opened 1974

It was front-page news when the only consistent live music venue on Guadalupe Street adjacent to the UT campus closed in 2002. A parade of great talent played on the tiny stage in the front window overlooking "The Drag"—from Steve Earle to Timbuk 3, Spoon, and Alejandro Escovedo's garage band Buick MacKane. It was sad to lose all that. But a trio of entrepreneurs saved the club from the

wrecking ball, kept the live music, and installed a beer garden for folks who'd rather talk than rock. More recently, a ramen shop occupied a restaurant space in the back. The Hole has adapted without losing its edginess.

**2538 Guadalupe St.**

[www.holeinthewallaustin.com](http://www.holeinthewallaustin.com)

**THE LITTLE LONGHORN SALOON** «

opened circa 1950s

This tiny stone-and-mortar building on Burnet Road is thought to be over 100 years old and once housed a grocery store and a filling station. But for the past 50-some years, The Little Longhorn—called Ginny's Little Longhorn under previous ownership—has been a bastion of true honky-tonk music. Not to mention Sunday's "Chicken Sh\*t Bingo," an Austin tradition. Don't miss one of the regular performances by James Hand, an original Texas honky-tonk troubadour who isn't a nostalgia act.

**5434 Burnet Road**

[www.thelittlelonghornsaloon.com](http://www.thelittlelonghornsaloon.com)

**BROKEN SPOKE**

opened 1964

Built on the edge of town, this two-steppers' roadhouse is now smack dab in the middle of trendy South Lamar Boulevard. But when you're inside, it's still the '60s. One of owner James White's first touring acts was Bob Wills in 1966. From 1975 to 1982, George Strait played here monthly. The Spoke's got history—and a damn fine chicken-fried steak!

**3201 S. Lamar Blvd.**

[www.brokenspokeaustintx.net](http://www.brokenspokeaustintx.net)

**ANTONE'S**

opened 1975

Can you name all six locations of Austin's "Home of the Blues"? Antone's feels like it's home again with its 2015 move to East Fifth Street, about four blocks from where the late Clifford Antone opened the original club so he could hear the likes of Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed. Now co-owned by guitar great Gary Clark Jr., who got his start at the club's fourth location when he was 15, Antone's nurtures a mystique that lives on in a new club that's nicer inside but just as gritty onstage as ever before.

**305 E. 5th St.**

[www.antonesnightclub.com](http://www.antonesnightclub.com)

**SAXON PUB**

opened 1990

Booking as many as six acts a night, from happy hour to last call, the small club with the giant knight in armor out front has hosted an estimated 24,000 sets. Richard Vannoy, the Saxon's soundman for 25 years, has likely heard more live music than anyone in town. There were some lean years early on, but the Saxon eventually found its crowd—older live-music lovers who have to work in the morning and don't want to deal with Sixth Street, Red River, or the Warehouse District. The Saxon was a launching pad for Los Lonely Boys, Hayes Carll, Carolyn Wonderland, Monte Montgomery, and many more. Bob Schneider's Monday night residency is his favorite gig every week.

**1320 S. Lamar Blvd.**

[www.thesaxonpub.com](http://www.thesaxonpub.com)



**SXSW 2017**

Austin music venues are gearing up for the city's busiest week of live music during the annual South by Southwest Music Festival (March 13-19), when more than 2,200 bands come to town.

[www.sxsw.com](http://www.sxsw.com)





### CONTINENTAL CLUB »

opened 1955  
Taking over a former laundromat, the Continental began as a private club featuring jazz combos. It was a sad haven for day-drinkers for most of the '60s and '70s but found its identity in the '80s as a club that booked the best in rock music, from punk to roots. And the bands get an instant review: If bartender Clara "Que Si" Reed jumps onstage to go-go dance during your set, that's four stars! If you want to see what Austin used to be like, there's the Toni Price "Hippie Hour" love-fest every Tuesday. Upstairs, a show at the separate Continental Gallery's intimate room is like having a jazz combo or singer-songwriter James McMurtry in your home.  
**1315 S. Congress Ave.**  
[www.continentalclub.com](http://www.continentalclub.com)

### EMO'S

opened 1992  
Only the name is the same. The Emo's at Sixth and Red River was the coolest punk dive in the country, "a home away from home for misfits," says original manager David L. Thomson III. The glorious dive closed in 2011 and relocated into a state-of-the-art rock box. Now owned by Austin-based promoters C3 Presents, Emo's current incarnation has more in common with a House of Blues than its dive roots. But Emo's still books great shows with top club talent.  
**2015 E. Riverside Drive**  
[www.emosaustin.com](http://www.emosaustin.com)

### THREADGILL'S SOUTH

opened 1996  
Known more for its home-cooking than its house rocking, Threadgill's South Austin location was built next door to where the legendary

hippie venue Armadillo World Headquarters (owner Eddie Wilson's first club) was located, so there had to be a live-music component. This 600-capacity, open-air venue is a great place to see Shinyribs, Carolyn Wonderland, and other acts that infuse roots music with new ideas and energy.  
**301 Riverside Drive**  
[www.threadgills.com](http://www.threadgills.com)

### SAHARA LOUNGE

opened 1978  
When the authentic juke joint T.C.'s Lounge closed in 2011, Old Austin sighed. Beloved clubs are almost always replaced by cleaner, fancier establishments with no soul. But the new owners, mother and son Eileen Bristol and Topaz McGarrigle, both musicians, renamed it the Sahara, kept the lounge's old wooden building intact, added a beer garden, and carried on T.C.'s community tradition. Saturday is Africa Night, with music by Zoumountchi or the Sahara House Band, and the rest of the week you'll find Latin music, rock-and-roll, neo soul, blues, psych, and more. Robert Plant was a regular when he lived in Austin circa 2012.  
**1413 Webberville Road**  
[www.saharalounge.com](http://www.saharalounge.com)

### SCOOT INN

opened 1955  
For decades this was a neighborhood bar, but live music became the draw about 10 years ago. The club's 1,100-capacity, outdoor stage often hosts touring rock acts, while the newly renovated indoor Ivy Room has a piano for cocktail jazz and blues. There's also a small room of old photos that chronicle the venue's history, starting when freed slaves opened a grocery store on this corner after the Civil War.  
**1308 E. Fourth St.**  
[www.scootinnaustin.com](http://www.scootinnaustin.com)

### BEERLAND

opened 2001  
Garage rock heaven! Former Bates Motel punk club employees Randall and Donya Stockton took two years and put everything they had into opening their own club. And the crowd from the shuttered Bates followed them from Sixth Street to Red River. Beerland likes its bands loud. Three chords are preferred, but two will do if your singer screams like his hair's on fire.  
**711 1/2 Red River St.**  
[www.beerlandtexas.com](http://www.beerlandtexas.com)

### ELEPHANT ROOM »

opened 1991  
If jazz is your thing, then you want to check yourself into this E.R. The best musicians in town play this basement club, which often doesn't charge a cover (it's \$5 on Fridays and Saturdays), and you never know which Marsalis is going to pop in for a jam. You can't miss with trumpeter Ephraim Owens, an E-Room regular when he's not on tour with Mumford & Sons or the Tedeschi Trucks Band.  
**315 Congress Ave.**  
[www.elephantroom.com](http://www.elephantroom.com)

*Michael Corcoran has been covering Austin music since 1984, including for the Austin Chronicle and Austin American-Statesman. Austin freelance photographer Tiffany Hofeldt has seen most of the city's music venues through the excursions of her guitar-playing husband. She embraces any opportunity to photograph all things Texas and music related.*

### LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL

For upcoming shows at music clubs, along with Austin travel information, call the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau at **512/474-5171**;  
[www.austintexas.org](http://www.austintexas.org)



TOP, THE CONTINENTAL CLUB ON SOUTH CONGRESS THRIVES ON ROOTS AND ROCK-AND-ROLL. BOTTOM, THE ELEPHANT ROOM, A BASEMENT CLUB, IS AUSTIN'S JAZZ HAVEN.

RECIPE

RIVERHOUSE GRILL  
ORANGE VINAIGRETTE

Makes 2 cups

- ◆ 2 teaspoons salt
- ◆ 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ◆ 2 minced garlic cloves
- ◆ 1/2 teaspoon mustard powder
- ◆ 1 tablespoon fresh grated ginger
- ◆ 1 teaspoon horseradish
- ◆ 1 cup orange marmalade
- ◆ 1/2 cup white balsamic vinegar
- ◆ 3/4 cup olive oil

Whisk ingredients together, and serve.

speared with a glowing candle.

Although the space feels elegant, you don't have to dress up to dine at the Riverhouse Grill. Tourists often show up in hiking or biking clothes, and families with children can come

straight from a day at Fossil Rim without having to change clothes.

Despite the Olejniks' Czech heritage, the food is mostly upscale American without being fussy. Milan says he tries to buy vegetables and fruits locally, and an herb garden behind the restaurant provides rosemary, mint, basil, and cilantro.

Dinner specials often feature fish, such as blackened catfish with shrimp étouffée, or seasonal dishes such as seared maple-leaf duck breast with black cherry sauce. Steak-lovers can't go wrong with the grilled cowboy rib-eye seasoned with a house-made rub. We love the steak, but we keep going back for the baked salmon (\$22). Milan dresses it up with a white butter sauce and serves it on a bed of garlic-lime rice. The lightly sautéed vegetables that accompany it—yellow squash, carrots, and zucchini—arrive sprinkled with garden herbs.

Desserts change seasonally. My favorite remains the gooey chocolate-chip bread pudding with caramel sauce; the serving is large enough for two to share. Key lime pie and flour-less chocolate cake with raspberry sauce also make a fine ending.

The Riverhouse Grill brings gourmet flair to Glen Rose. I hear many visitors comment on their surprise to find a restaurant of such high caliber in town, and one they feel so welcome at. That is Mary's legacy—extending the kind of warmth that goes way beyond food. **L**



RIVERHOUSE GRILL

is at 210 S.W. Barnard St. in Glen Rose. Call **254/898-8514**; [www.theriverhousegrill.net](http://www.theriverhousegrill.net). Hours: Wed-Sat 11 a.m.-2 p.m. and 5-9 p.m.; Sun 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Reservations encouraged on weekends.



Off-N-On

Step back in time at Waco's Cupp's Drive Inn

story by Michael Corcoran

**N**OW THAT IN-N-OUT BURGER HAS OPENED dozens of locations in Texas, there have been raves—as well as scattered “mehs”—for the California chain. But as a frequent highway traveler, with both a non-chain mindset and a “make good time” mantra, I prefer the burgers served at independent joints near freeway exits. These are the stops you relish on the road, places like Willy Burger in Beaumont, off I-10, and Carpenter Hamburgers in Corsicana, less than a mile from I-45. You get your old-fashioned cheeseburger fix, and then you're back on the freeway in three minutes or less.

One of my favorites of these “Off-N-On” burger joints is Cupp's Drive Inn of Waco, just a Hail Mary pass from the 18th Street exit off I-35. Opened in 1929 as Heaton's and bought by the Cupp family in 1947, this small white building has room for eight stools at the counter and four booths, plus five tables outside for overflow. They fill up on Baylor home football game

**You get your old-fashioned cheeseburger fix, and then you're back on the freeway in three minutes or less.**

days as the university is just down the road.

Cupp's is home of the classic Texas diner cheeseburger. Back in the 1950s, Cupp's had car service, and a young soldier from Fort Hood named Elvis Presley would occasionally sneak a double cheeseburger with bacon in the back seat of family friend Eddie Fadal's Cadillac. During his six months of Army training in 1959, Elvis retreated on weekends to Waco, where Fadal, a former DJ whom Elvis met on one of his earliest tours of Texas, built an addition on his house for Presley and filled it with records and TVs. Willie Nelson, from nearby Abbott, has been eating at Cupp's since the late '40s.

Cupp's is *Happy Days* without the jukebox and the Fonz, where Richie Cunningham is now a professor at Baylor who stops in at least once a week to taste his childhood. “Some

Co-owner Freddie Johnson mans the counter and the grill at Cupp's Drive Inn, a Waco staple since 1947.

# Gonzales <sup>TX</sup> Travel



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Texas Independence Relay  
March 24th - 25th

Relay For Life  
March 31st

Professional Bull Riding - JB Wells Arena  
April 1st



The Light Festival - JB Wells Park  
April 22nd and June 10th

Texas Junior High Rodeo State Finals - JB  
Wells Arena  
May 19th - 27th



For more information:  
888-672-1095  
GonzalesTX.Travel



burger places run their buns through a conveyor belt to heat them," said Freddie Johnson, who owns Cupp's with younger sister Sherry Caughenbaugh. "But there's nothing like toasting them on the grill."

**And most things remain the same. They still use only fresh ingredients, hand-peeling potatoes for french fries, making their own onion rings, and hand-breading the chicken-fried steak.**

Unless you have a scintillating lunch partner, you'll want to sit at the counter and watch Freddie and Sherry work the grill, one side of which is filled with face-down buns, while the other side sizzles with quarter-pound patties. Lettuce, tomatoes, onions, pickles—the usual—go on your cheeseburger at the build station, but for extra flavor, the spatula that's been flipping those

burgers gives a little love tap on the top of each bun.

This is how they've always done it at Cupp's, where change is about as welcome as a tax audit. "Our clientele really hates updates. We used to flatten our meat on the grill," Freddie said, cupping his hand as if it held a ball of hamburger meat, then miming a slap of the spatula. "Thwack! People loved that sound." But after a few years of doing that 100 times a day or more, it put such a strain on Johnson's shoulder that he started buying meat in patties.

"I told Sherry the other day, 'I'm not a customer, I'm a fixture,'" said David Ray, 70, who's been coming to Cupp's at least twice a week for 33 years. "I love the old-style atmosphere. Some of us weren't sure when they started using beef patties instead of balling up the meat and poppin' it on the grill. But it tastes just as good, so we came around on it."

And most things remain the same.

They still use only fresh ingredients, hand-peeling potatoes for french fries, making their own onion rings, and hand-breading the chicken-fried steak. "It's very labor intensive work," said Freddie, who turns 50 this year. He's been working at Cupp's since 1988, when his mother, Betty, who started working at Cupp's in 1957 as a carhop, bought the diner from a former waitress named—what else?—Flo. Sherry started working at Cupp's when she was 13. That was 29 years ago.

Though Baylor students and professors, plus blue-collar Wacoans, make up most of the clientele, Johnson said there's a new phenomenon bringing folks from all over. In May 2014, Chip and Joanna Gaines of HGTV's popular *Fixer Upper* opened Magnolia Market at the Silos, a distinctive shopping experience for fans of the Waco-based home improvement show. "They're bringing a lot of people to Waco," said Freddie, adding that he hasn't seen so many new faces at Cupp's since the standoff at the Branch Davidian compound in 1993, when members of the international press stayed in motels within walking distance to Cupp's.

Where *Fixer Upper* is about remodeling your surroundings, Cupp's remains resistant to change. They co-exist beautifully, because while Magnolia Market has trendy food trucks and a health-conscious restaurant, sometimes you just gotta have a greasy cheeseburger in an old-timey joint right off the freeway. At the midpoint between Dallas and Austin, this is a stop that makes you happy you decided to drive instead of fly. 🍔



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# That Dirty Ol' One-Man Band

Rollin' and Tumblin' With Scott H. Biram

story by Michael Corcoran

**S**COTT H. BIRAM IS A ONE-MAN BAND WHO HAS blown five-piece rock groups off the stage. But the San Marcos native is just as at home picking country blues on his back porch, with his chickens running around the yard, as he is in a nightclub.

Artists such as Lightnin' Hopkins, Bill Monroe, and Woody Guthrie led the way for Biram's supercharged roots music. But wearing a faded Black Flag T-shirt and stomping out rhythms with his left foot on a rectangle of electrified wood, Biram plays

**After 13 surgeries, Biram was the man tough enough to take whatever life threw his way.**

with the swagger of a punk rocker.

With the February release of his 10th solo album, *The Bad Testament*, the 43-year-old Biram is back on the road, including shows across the United States and Europe, after taking his first extended break from touring in 20 years. "Usually when I come home from a tour, the guitars stay in the van. I don't want to touch a guitar," he said. "But with six months off, I got back into practicing the guitar five hours a day. I started loving to play the guitar again."

Biram is a student of traditional blues and country who also loves punk, early Metallica, AC/DC, and Slayer. But he doesn't go through musical phases—he piles his influences on top of each other like a musical junkman and sets out in the world with his sonic wares. His songs celebrate the road life and the redemption of rivers, which wash away the grit of the road.

"The highway and the river are the two places I feel most at home," said Biram, who now lives in Austin. "Growing up, the San Marcos River was just a part of life."

Biram's musical mind was set as a 6-year-old when his parents took him to see the legendary folk/bluegrass guitarist Doc Watson at Austin's Armadillo World Headquarters. Even as he played in loud, fast garage bands while attending San Marcos High School and Texas State University (Southwest Texas State at the time), Biram returned to the music of the mountains and the Mississippi Delta.

His affinity for lo-fi studio production was sealed at age 14, when his parents bought him a four-track tape recorder for Christmas. Biram found it hidden in the closet a week earlier and recorded his first original tunes before putting the recorder back in the box and acting surprised on Dec. 25.

Billing himself "The Dirty Old One-Man Band," Biram is a self-contained unit, also doing most of his production

work by himself at his home studio.

"I guess band politics didn't sit with me too well," he said of his earlier career as guitarist for such San Marcos bands as the Thangs and Bluegrass Drive-By. "But I never wanted to be that guy in a coffeehouse, singing his songs. I always had the rock-and-roll club in mind."



## SCOTT H. BIRAM

Scott H. Biram's next Texas show is July 23 at 3TEN ACL Live in Austin. Keep up with Biram's touring schedule and other news at [scottbiram.com](http://scottbiram.com).

"Hiram," as Biram often refers to himself, comes to those venues with an economical advantage. "Scott says he's never lost money on a show," said Jesse Dayton, an Austin musician who has toured the country with Biram four times. "It helps when you just have to pay yourself."

Another great thing about being a one-man boogie machine is that you can play off the crowd without any filters. During a recent show at Cheatham Street Warehouse in San Marcos, Biram started his set with a mix of blues, folk, gospel, and metal before ending with a flurry of songs that roared off the stage and down the highway. "I guess you guys want to hear some truck-driving songs," Biram said after the first one ended in whoops and hollers. "All right then, let's just haul on down that road."

Four more trucker songs followed, and even the stray metalhead in the crowd was banging his head to the rhythm of Biram's hard-worn 1959 Gibson hollow-body electric guitar. "I've been to Detroit, L.A., New York, Mississippi-eye-aye/ Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam, East Texas, and Vietnam," the crowd sang along on "Truck Driver," a Biram classic.

Forgotten in the moment was the afternoon in March 2003 when an out-of-control truck driver almost ended Biram's life. Biram was driving from



Photo: Will van Overbeek

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**BIRAM'S FAVORITE VENUES, DIVES, AND BBQ**

Scott H. Biram has played just about everywhere in his 20-plus years as a traveling one-man band. Along the way, he's found some favorite stages across Texas, among them The Continental Club in Austin and Houston, Riley's Tavern in Hunter, the Gas Monkey in Dallas, and the now-defunct Triple Crown in San Marcos.

When he's off the road, Biram likes to revisit his Central Texas dive bars of choice, including Fuzzy's Corner near Buchanan Dam and Riley's Tavern. And he can't get enough of smoked meats.

"I consider myself a barbecue connoisseur," Biram said, listing City Market in Luling, Smitty's in Lockhart, and Opie's in Spicewood as his top three. "Barbecue is hit-or-miss on the road, so when I'm home I go to the old standbys."

San Marcos to Kingsbury on Texas 123 when an 18-wheeler crossed the centerline and collided head-on with his pickup. Photos of the wreck make it hard to believe anyone could have survived. "They didn't think I was going to make it to the hospital because of internal bleeding," said Biram, who was trapped in his mangled car for 25 minutes.

"Everybody still wants to talk about it," Biram said of the accident, "but I've moved on." He acknowledged, however,

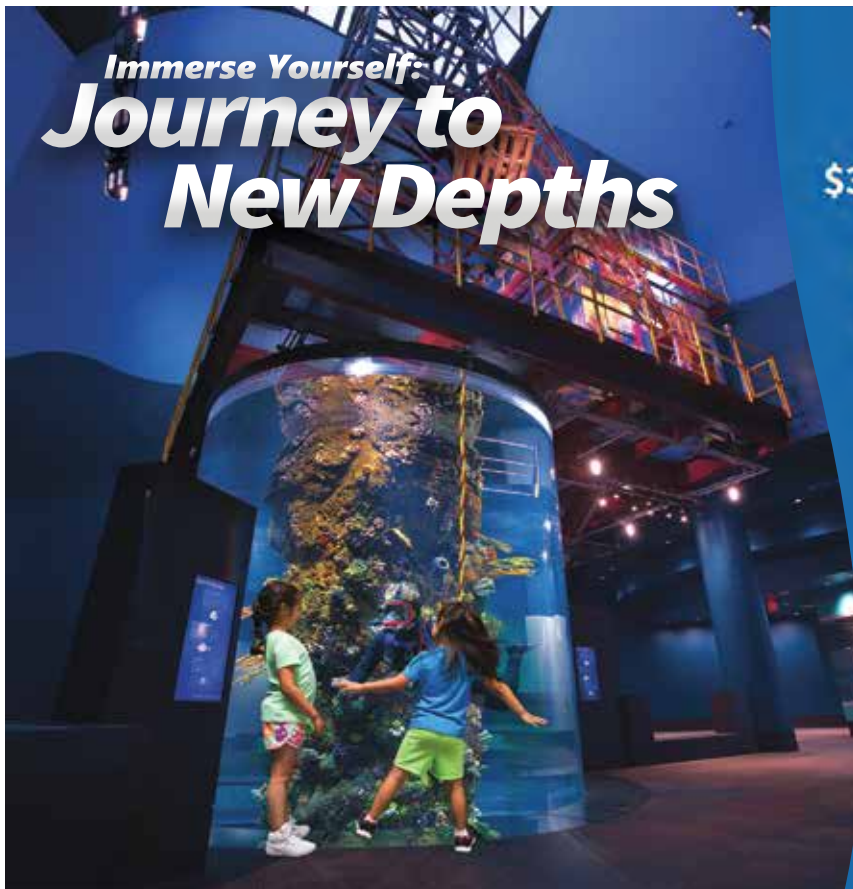
that his tale of survival is hard to top. "I wouldn't do it again," Biram said with a big laugh. "But that wreck helped give me a legendary story."

After 13 surgeries, Biram was the man tough enough to take whatever life threw his way. The experience reinforced Biram's reputation as a heroic outlaw whose music is shot through with real life drama. His songs have been used in several TV shows, including *Sons of Anarchy* and *Dog the Bounty Hunter*, plus the Oscar-

nominated film *Hell or High Water*. That's made for some nice mailbox money, but this guy in a mesh-back trucker hat makes most of his living on the road.

The life of a touring musician, especially one who has metal rods in his legs, is not an easy one. But when you can rock the house like Biram does, you have a lot of nice memories for those long drives.

"It's not a bad life," Biram said. "My music is built for the road." 🎸



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# TAKE 2

## THE FLICKERING EXCITEMENT OF RESTORED MOVIEHOUSES

— STORY BY MICHAEL CORCORAN —

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF WILSON



# A

s Hollywood blossomed in the early 20th century, movie houses became the social and entertainment hubs of both small towns and big cities across Texas. But the advent of television's free programming in the 1950s, a residential exodus to the suburbs, and the popularity of drive-in cinemas caused downtown marqueees to go dark, one by one. As the movie industry shifted to multiscreen cineplexes in the 1960s, most downtown theaters were torn down or repurposed as hardware or clothing stores, storage buildings, day cares, non-denominational churches, and the like.

But in recent years, flickering excitement has returned to many of the historic downtown theaters across Texas. Some have been fabulously refurbished into world-class music venues, like The Kessler Theater in Dallas and The Heights Theater in

Houston. In Greenville, the Texan Theater has been renovated as a classy dinner theater. Still other abandoned movie houses have been resurrected for their original purposes as first-run movie theaters, places where the town once again follows plotlines together in the dark.

Whether presenting bands, movies, or dramatic plays, these restored theaters not only provide entertainment for locals and visiting audiences. They also serve as anchors of local pride and community engagement. But such projects don't come together without enough vision and hard work to resurrect an old building into something new again.

## — GLOBE THEATRE — BERTRAM

The Globe Theatre injected new life into downtown Bertram when it reopened in late 2015 after decades of dormancy. "When we started, we thought live music would be our thing, and we'd show movies on the side," said Globe co-owner Lance Regier, who grew up in nearby Leander and played in high school bands with his business partner Zach Hamilton. "But the town really comes out for the movies, so we had to flip it around." The Globe, which was built in 1935 from the same type of "sunset red" granite used to build the Texas Capitol in Austin, shows about four movies a month, while booking at least one concert and various private events each month.

Restoring the original marquee is usually a priority, so Regier and Hamilton were a little perplexed when they learned that the Globe's vintage sign had disappeared in the '90s. "We thought we'd have to build a new one," said Regier, "but we got lucky." After a tip, they found the Globe marquee on a goat farm outside of Bertram, buried under a mountain of junk. With a \$10,000 grant from the Bertram Economic Development Fund, the Globe Theater's original plumage was beautifully restored.

Some of these restoration projects have taken years to complete, without much financial return. The Globe took six years. Hamilton and Regier did much of the finish-out work themselves, and they took their time to do it right, finding recovered vintage theater seats in Tennessee and rescuing wood flooring from a 1930s Sears store in San Angelo for the stage. "It's more than a hobby, but not a fulltime job," said Regier, who works a desk job by day.

## — GRAND THEATER — YOAKUM

South of Interstate 10 in the cattle country of south-central Texas, schoolteacher Tammy Steinmann had been talking about bringing back Yoakum's 1922 Grand Theater "since I started dating my husband 15 years ago." A 1994 graduate of Yoakum High School, she knew from experience that the town needed "something for the kids to do." Steinmann bought the building from a church, and with the aid of a \$150,000 economic development grant from the city, restored the theater and reopened the Grand in September 2016.

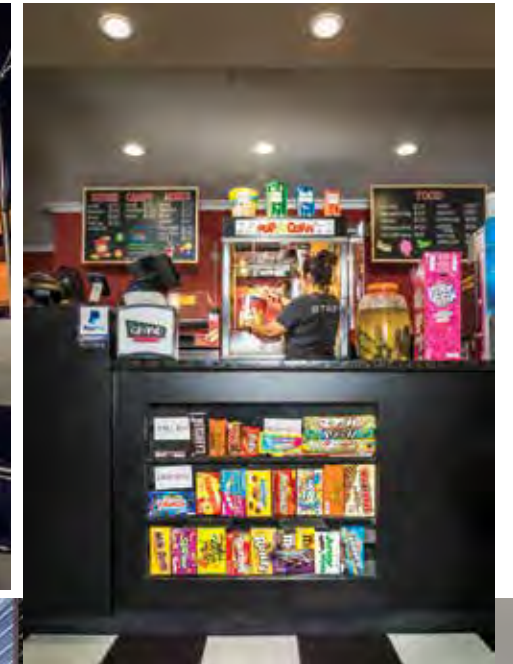
From the sidewalk, the Grand's lit-up art deco marquee makes it feel like we just got our boys back from Korea. But the reclaimed movie theater, which operates Thursday through Sunday, has a modern interior with high-back gray chairs and red-and-black theater curtains lining the walls to enhance the room's acoustics. Steinmann uses the same Barco digital projector found at multiplexes. The Grand screens free movies on Wednesdays in the summer, and in February, it will host its first theatrical production—the Main Street Theater of Houston's *Junie B. Jones is not a Crook*.

"There's a lot of history being brought back," Steinmann said. "We're always having couples tell us they had their first date at the Grand 40 or 50-something years ago. They bring their grandchildren now."



### THE INSIDE SCOOP

*Opening spread: J.R. Thomasson's mural at the Cactus Theater in Lubbock. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Kessler in Dallas; Grand in Yoakum; Heights in Houston; Heights in Houston; Texan in Greenville; Cactus in Lubbock.*



HEIGHTS THEATER  
HOUSTON



KESSLER THEATER  
DALLAS

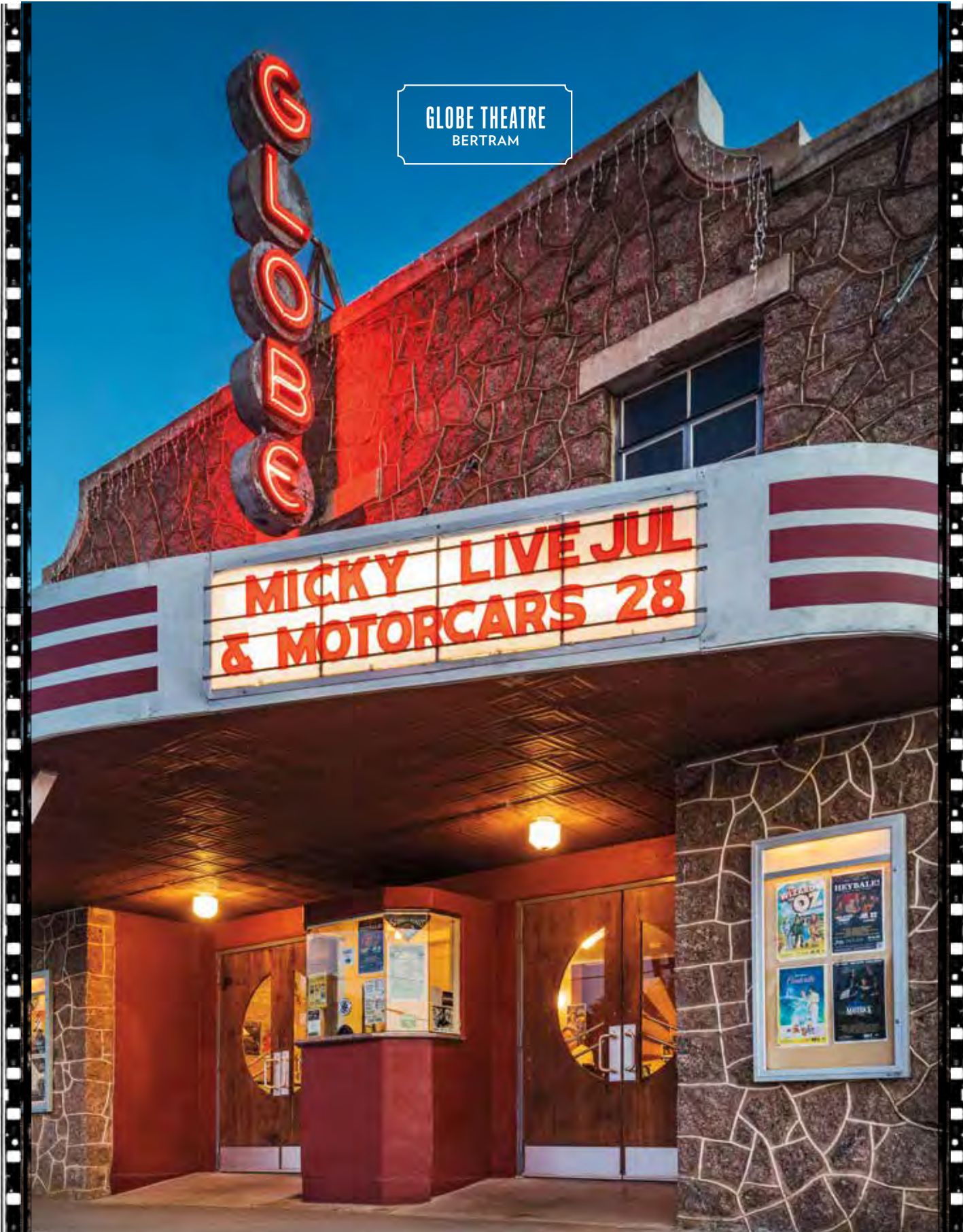


CACTUS THEATER  
LUBBOCK



GRAND THEATER  
YOAKUM





GLOBE THEATRE  
BERTRAM



TEXAN THEATER  
GREENVILLE

## ESSENTIALS

### THE GLOBE THEATRE

is at 132 W. Vaughan St. in Bertram.  
Call 512-627-3962; globetheatretx.com.

#### UPCOMING CONCERTS

Bruce Robison with Aaron McDonnell on Aug. 25.

### THE GRAND THEATER

is at 212 W. May St. in Yoakum. Call 361-427-4002;  
yoakumgrandtheater.com.

#### MOVIE TIMES

7 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 4 and 7 p.m.  
Saturday, and 1, 4, and 7 p.m. Sunday.

### THE KESSLER THEATER

is at 1230 W. Davis St. in Dallas.  
Call 214-272-8346; thekessler.org.

#### UPCOMING CONCERTS

Spyro Gyra on Sept. 8 and Sarah Jarosz on Nov. 4.

### THE HEIGHTS THEATER

is at 339 W. 19th St. in Houston.  
Call 214-272-8346; theheightstheater.com.

#### UPCOMING CONCERTS

Delbert McClinton Sept. 1 and Deer Tick Nov. 17.

### THE TEXAN THEATER

is at 2712 Lee St. in Greenville. Call 903-259-6360;  
texantheatergreenville.com.

#### UPCOMING CONCERTS

Bruce Robison and Kelly Willis on Sept. 8  
and Gary Morris on Oct. 15.

### THE CACTUS THEATER

is at 1812 Buddy Holly Ave. in Lubbock.  
Call 806-762-3233; cactustheater.com.

#### UPCOMING SHOWS

Baby Boomer Comedy Show on Sept. 16  
and Ray Wylie Hubbard on Oct. 5.

### THE KESSLER DALLAS

### THE HEIGHTS HOUSTON

In this new revival of old theaters, the great stories aren't just on the screen or in song. There's the one about Edwin Cabaniss, who left his position as a Dallas investment banker to bring quality live music to the long-dormant Kessler Theater in the Dallas neighborhood of Oak Cliff in 2010. Six years later, he did the same thing with the Heights Theater in Houston.

Both the Kessler and the Heights were rebuilt as live music venues for national and regional touring acts. The Kessler's renovation included leveling the sloped floors—in part because Edwin's wife, Lisa Cabaniss, runs a dance studio for kids in the building during the day. And when Cabaniss had \$60,000 left in his budget to open the doors, he decided to spend it on a powerful sound system.

"You know that story about how Cortez burned his boats so he couldn't go back? I had that moment of no retreat about two years in," said Cabaniss, who traded his business suit for a black cowboy shirt with pearl buttons.

The show that helped convince Cabaniss he had something special with the Kessler was the Dallas return of Annie Clark, better known as St. Vincent, in October 2011. The two wildly received sellouts got the attention of not only Dallas music fans, but also national booking agents. Suddenly, the Kessler was the hot room in Texas because of its intimacy and attentive audiences. After you've seen an act at the Kessler or the Heights—which are nearly identical inside—it's hard to see them at a nightclub or a festival.

"Everybody kept telling me, 'you've gotta bring the Kessler concept to Houston,'" said Cabaniss, who likes to greet his customers when he's in town. Before a recent Bob Schneider show at the

Heights, Cabaniss shook hands and answered questions from customers, who welcomed the infusion of energy that the Heights has brought to 19th Street.

As with the Kessler, no vantage point in the rectangle-shaped Heights Theater is more than 30 yards from the stage. "We knew from the Kessler what an old theater can mean to a community," Cabaniss said.

### TEXAN THEATER GREENVILLE

Greenville native Barbara Horan sought to provide "entertainment as it should be" with her renovation of Greenville's Texan Theater, which was built as an opera house in the 1890s. (Houdini played here!) Sick of going to shows where she was jostled by crowds, stuck in lines, and obstructed from the stage, Horan designed the Texan as a VIP experience in a beautiful building with pristine sound. Such treatment isn't cheap. Most tickets cost \$100 to \$200, which includes a four-course dinner with table service. Drinks are also available.

It may take time for the Texan's approach to catch on in a town of only 26,000, but the marquee's neon lights, which shine all night, even when there's not a show, announce a rejuvenation of the entire community. The Texan's arrival complements Greenville's growing list of downtown draws, including the Corner Street Pub next door and Landon Winery & Bistro nearby.

"Greenville has come alive," said Francis Bouknight, who attends many shows at the Texan. Whether it's country music (Tracy Byrd, Jason Boland), oldies acts (Village People, Shirley Jones), folk/blues (Ruthie Foster, Guy Forsyth) or a theater production, Bouknight has been there. She even came out the night Donny Most (Ralph Malph from *Happy Days*) crooned Sinatra and Dean Martin. "We can't drive into Dallas to see a show," Bouknight's friend Ann

Weeks said, "so the Texan is a godsend."

Horan was so keen on restoring every original detail of the Texan, including the terrazzo floors, that she bought the building next door to add new restrooms. She also opened the Texan Lobby Café, a coffee shop open seven days a week serving soups, salads, and sandwiches.

Horan said the project stemmed from her desire to save the Texan's neon marquee, the only one remaining of six old theaters in downtown Greenville. "So I saved the neon, and everything else snowballed," she said.

### CACTUS THEATER LUBBOCK

Up in the Panhandle, record producer Don Caldwell intended to create a new music venue for local talent and touring acts like the Flatlanders (originally from Lubbock) when he brought the 1937 Cactus Theater back to life in 1994. After the Cactus closed in 1958, it was gutted and used to store scrap iron. While restoration was out of the question, Caldwell rejuvenated the theater, including hiring John Russell Thomasson to paint a wrap-around mural of caprock canyons beneath blue skies.

"The Cactus is one of the coolest places we've ever played," said former Joe Ely drummer Davis McLarty, now an Austin-based booking agent. "The crowd is right up there with you, so there's a lot of energy to go with the intimacy. And that mural is out of this world."

Lubbock entrepreneur Darryl Holland, owner of Holly Hop Ice Cream Shop, bought the 400-capacity Cactus in 2016. Holland's all-star house band, the Rhythm Machine, does special themed nights, covering soul/R&B one night and '50s rock'n'roll the next.


Holland enhanced the Cactus marquee with new lighting and upgraded the Cactus' sound system and expanded its cinema capability. "With a flick of a button, we can go from a live band onstage to a classic film on the screen," he said.

#### WEB EXTRA

In Mason, the 1928 Odeon Theater shows first-run movies and hosts concerts in the same building where Walt Disney attended the 1957 premier of *Old Yeller*. Read more about the Odeon Theater online at [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com).

The entrepreneurs behind all of these theaters took them on mostly as passion projects, intent on resurrecting classic movie house structures for modern times. But they're not immune from feasibility. "It's all about knowing your clientele and programming accordingly," Cabaniss said. "My background is in analytics, so I did a lot of research. I had to balance my creative side, which was telling me to go for it, with the financial side, which was asking, 'Is this business model going to work?'"

So far, so good. In 2016 and the first half of 2017, more than 100,000 music fans attended shows at the Kessler and the Heights.

"I went from thinking I was just going to do something nice for the neighborhood," said Cabaniss, "to wondering if this was what I was destined to do with my life." 

*The author of All Over the Map: True Heroes of Texas Music, Michael Corcoran says his favorite show in a restored theater may have been John Prime at Austin's Paramount Theatre in 1985. The opening act—an unknown named Lyle Lovett—pretty much stole the show. Austin photographer Jeff Wilson has worked photo jobs as diverse as the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas DPS Crime Lab.*