



TOBY KEITH
His Explosive New Tour



GEORGE STRAIT
Where His Career Began

COUNTRY WEEKLY

THE INSIDE STORIES ON COUNTRY MUSIC'S HOTTEST STARS
JUNE 28, 2010

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ALBUM

Details inside
on page 6

BRAD PAISLEY

WET & WILD SUMMER

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Plus

Summer plans with his family

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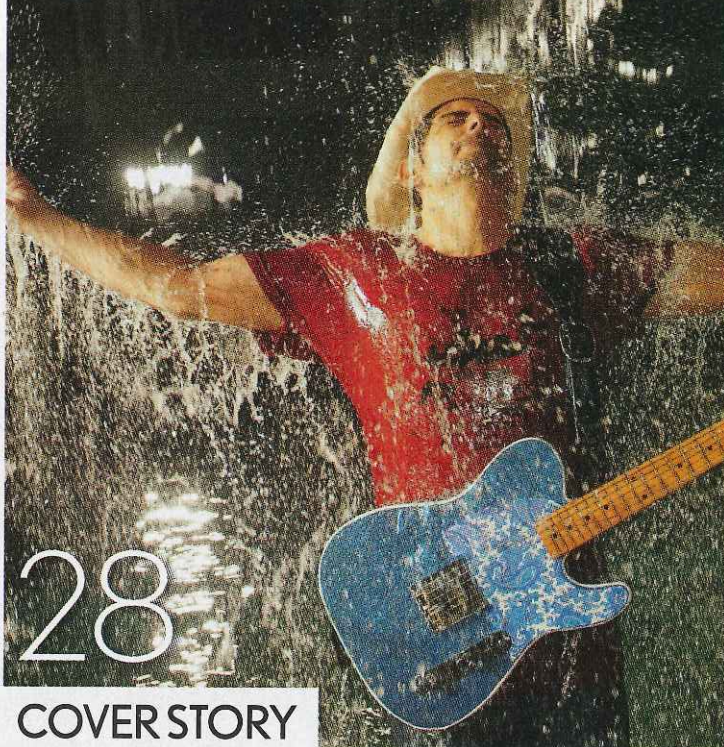
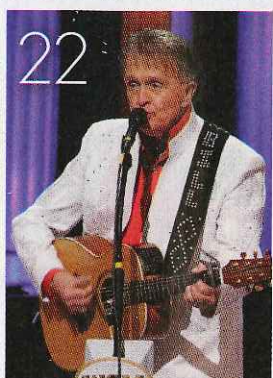


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**Offers marriage advice
to Blake and Miranda**

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COVER STORY

Brad Paisley

After the historic Nashville floods immersed Brad Paisley's stage gear, the opening night of his H2O World Tour was in hot water. In this exclusive CW interview, Brad explains how his hardworking crew managed to get the massive concert undertaking shipshape in the nick of time—much to the delight of the thousands who came prepared to dive right in.

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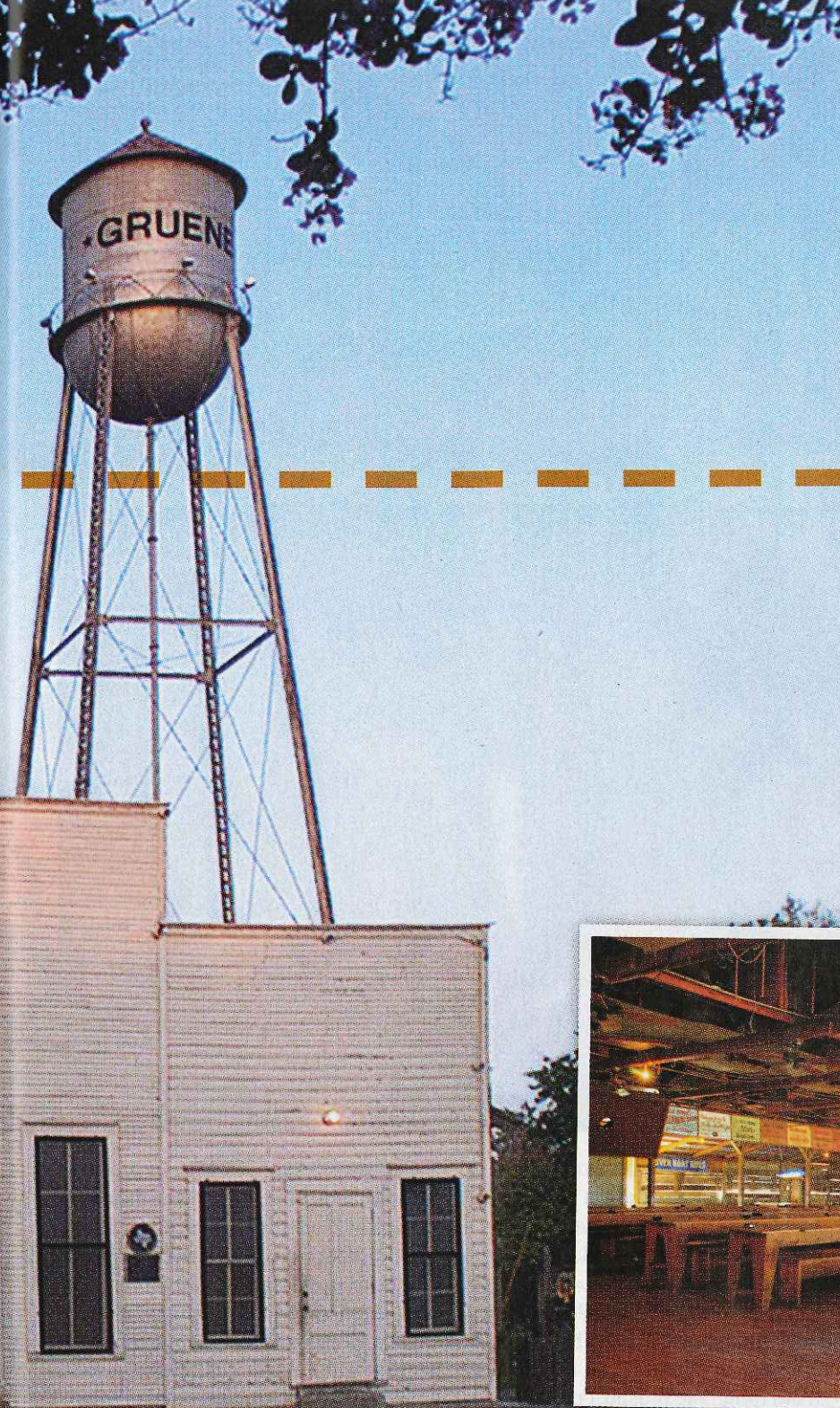
How the svelte singer—whom the press used to poke fun at for not being rail-thin—made it into *Shape* magazine's new "Sexiest Bodies in Music" issue.

Gruene Days

Gruene Hall, the Texas club that helped launch the careers of George Strait and many others, celebrates 35 years of cool music and great fun.

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN





This year, the "good old joint," Gruene Hall, celebrates the 35th anniversary of its revitalization. (Above) The famous as well as the up and coming have packed Gruene's dance-hall floor and stage since the beloved venue was revamped in the mid-1970s.

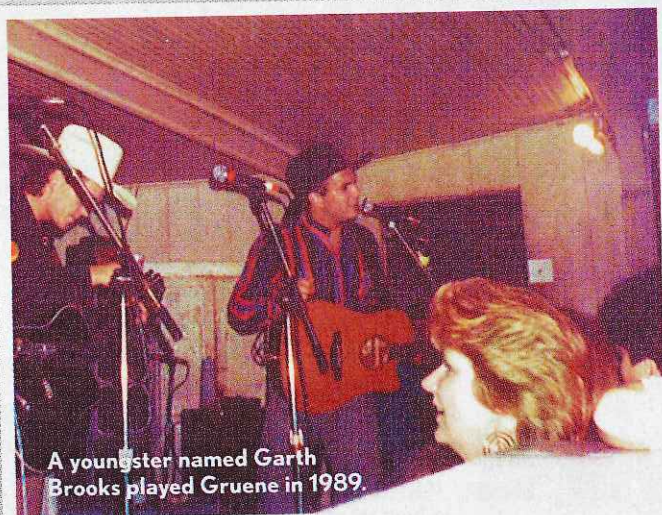
Before he ignited his career with his debut single, "Unwound," George Strait was an unknown Texas troubadour, always looking for a place to ply his wares. He found a friendly home at a little old dance hall in southwest Texas called Gruene (pronounced "green") Hall in the late 1970s, and effectively started what would become a career of superstar proportions. And ever since George's star rose, Gruene Hall has been the launching pad for such artists as Jack Ingram, Hal Ketchum, Lyle Lovett and a host of other now-established stars. This year, Gruene Hall, which bills itself as "the oldest continually run dance hall in Texas," and the Gruene Historic District are celebrating 35 years of great music at the revitalized venue.

Gruene Hall has always been a music and dance hall, but to call it "thriving" 35 years ago would have been kind at best and certainly inaccurate at the least. A local entrepreneur, Pat Molak (later joined by business partner Mary Jane Nalley), bought the hall and a few other buildings in the town of Gruene in 1975. (Gruene is now a

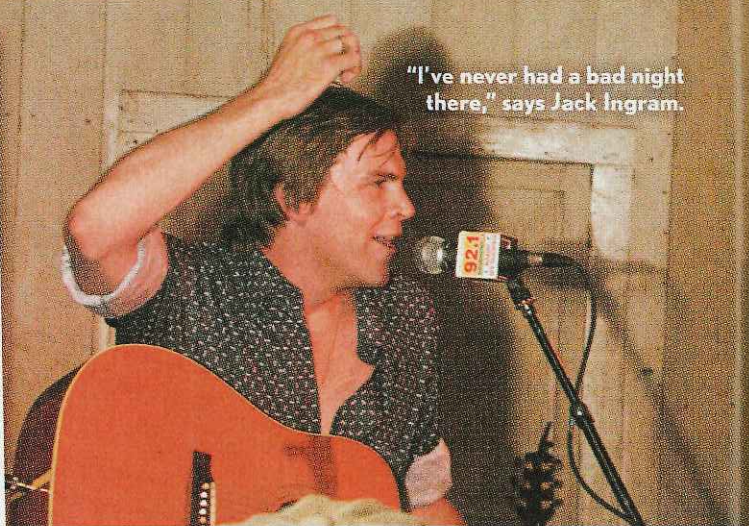


part of New Braunfels, Texas.) Pat, who still owns the hall, talked with *Country Weekly* about his involvement with the district and the revival of the now-famous Gruene Hall.

"I was a pretty unsuccessful stockbroker," he begins with a laugh, "and was literally looking for a dance hall to buy. A friend of mine told me about this dance hall for sale in this little old com-



A youngster named Garth Brooks played Gruene in 1989.



"I've never had a bad night there," says Jack Ingram.



Local favorite Hal Ketchum rocked the hall in 2005.

GRUENE HALL CONTINUED

munity called Gruene. I went up there and he was right and, believe it or not, most of the town was also for sale. There wasn't much going on. There were other people who bought various buildings, and the town just got revitalized."

The original dance hall was built in 1878, and was part of a once-bustling community. "The Gruene family arrived in the area around the mid-1800s," Pat explains. "Old man Gruene was a cotton farmer who did very well. He built a general store and a bank and also built a cotton gin on the banks of the Guadalupe River. Gruene is right there on the river, which is what made it an attractive spot for us. And it's also situated between Austin and San Antonio, which

has been a big help to us, too. But when we bought the hall in 1975, it was just sitting there. We had to clean it out and put in some good, modern wiring and other additional things."

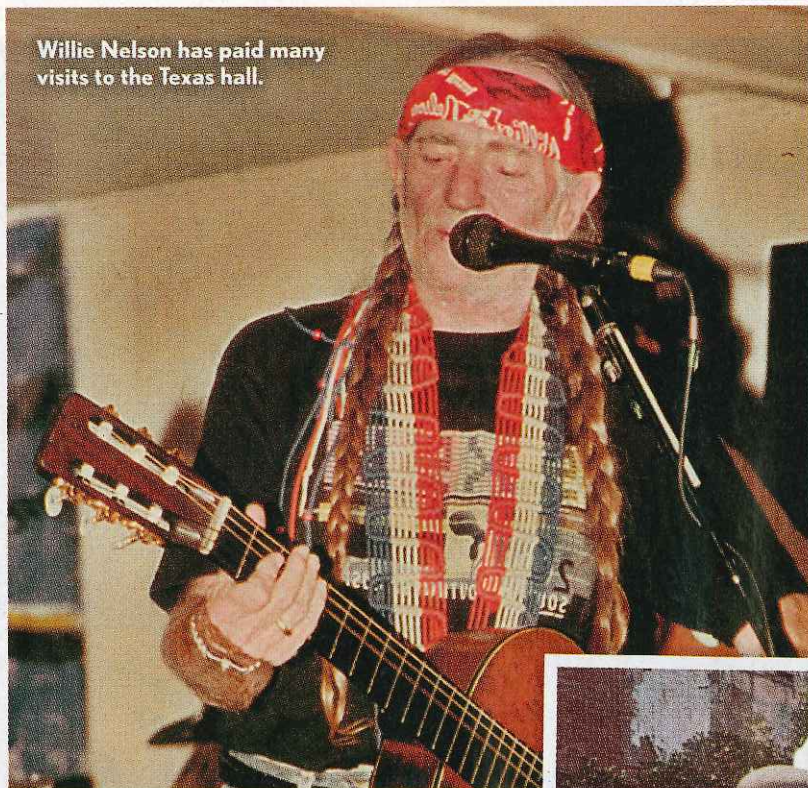
When Pat restored the hall, he was merely aiming for a place where people could hear good local bands and have a high old time. The prospect of becoming a famous music hall was hardly in the grand design. But Gruene's visibility grew after Pat booked a youngster named George Strait and his Ace in the Hole Band in 1975.

George was headlining shows in the area around Southwest Texas State University (since renamed Texas State University) in San Marcos, which is right up the road from Gruene. "I got wind that there was this hot band with

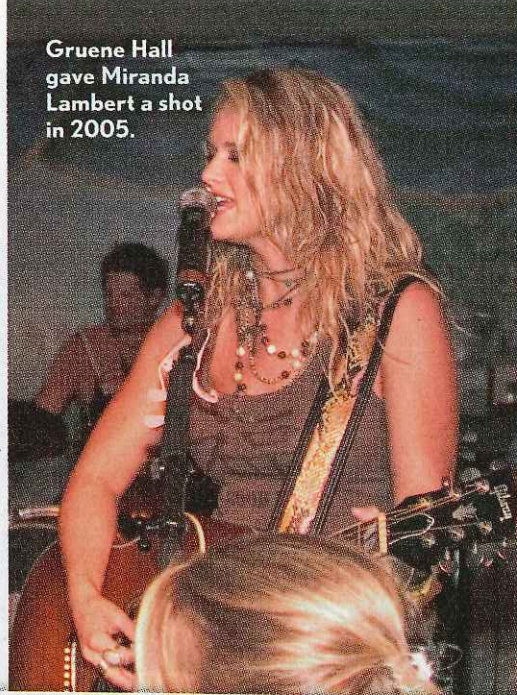
a cool singer that was getting pretty popular and that I should get them to play at the hall," Pat recalls. "He played there regularly from the late 1970s up to the early 1980s."

Gruene Hall also managed to land another newcomer, an Oklahoma kid named Garth Brooks, right in the nick of time. "I had a booking agent that I often worked with who told me that Garth was going to be huge and I'd better book him," Pat says. "He did play here right around early 1989, and his voice was killer and he was also a real sweet guy who talked to everyone. And right after that, his career took off. I was going to frame the contract he signed, but have never done it. We also had the Dixie Chicks early in their career, and we got them before they went through the roof."

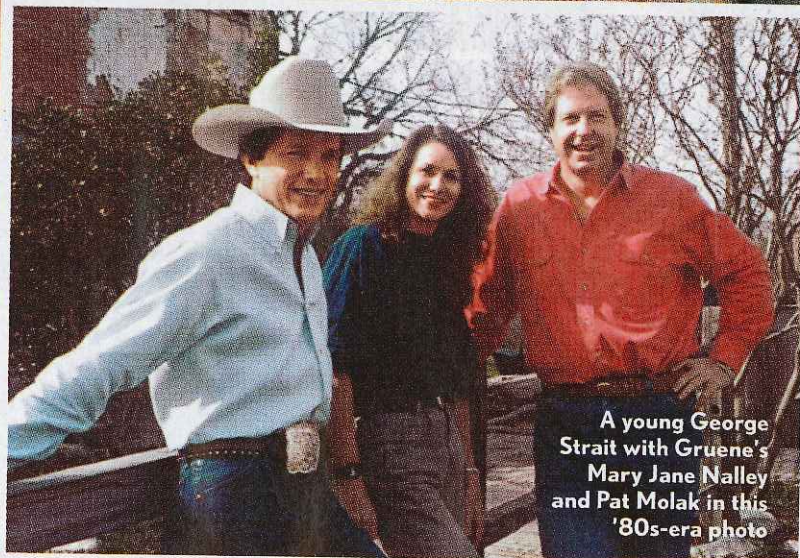
Willie Nelson has paid many visits to the Texas hall.



Gruene Hall gave Miranda Lambert a shot in 2005.



Naturally, Texan Pat Green has often played Gruene.



A young George Strait with Gruene's Mary Jane Nalley and Pat Molak in this '80s-era photo

Asleep at the Wheel, Lyle Lovett, Bruce Robison and Robert Earl Keen, among others, have played the place. "A lot of them still come back to play," Pat says.

One of those loyal returnees is Jack Ingram, who played a gig at Gruene this past year and always makes the hall a

never had a bad night there and I'll keep going back to play until I die."

Gruene Hall and the Historic District have plenty to celebrate in this 35th year of restoration. The little old dance hall is now a big-time institution—tourists from all over the world

And as far as the success of Gruene Hall, Pat chalks it up to the fan-friendly atmosphere. "It's one of those venues where the fans can get real close to the artists," he says. "The stars love to play there and many of them say that it's their favorite venue. People love it

"GRUENE HALL IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PLACE FOR ME AND MY MUSIC." —JACK INGRAM

fixture on his touring schedule. Jack first performed at the hall in 1995, according to his best recollection, opening for Merle Haggard. "Gruene Hall is such an important place for me and my music," says Jack, who lives in the Austin area. "To me, it's like the Ryman in Nashville as far as just a great music venue. I have

help power the town's economy, and folks looking for wet and wild fun can find it on the scenic Guadalupe River. "We have been pretty lucky," Pat says with a hearty laugh. "Mary Jane Nalley is still my business partner and we own around eight to 10 buildings in Gruene. So, we stay pretty busy."

because it's just a good old joint."

Gruene Hall is marking its 35th year with a basically yearlong party, with scheduled performances by Radney Foster, Charlie Robison and others in the coming weeks ahead. Check gruenehall.com for the updated schedule. **CW**