

10 Best Fests – save the date! **Outlaws...** caught in the act!

texashighways.com » January 2013

Texas Highways

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

We miss you
big fella ...
To see more about
the Texas State Fair,
see page 25

Texas to-do's

12 can't miss,
must do, can't call
yourself a Texan,
see 'em before
they're gone... **list**
see page 16

Plus:
**VINTAGE
CHARM IN
WINNSBORO**
see page 28

**DAYTRIPPIN'
TO LA GRANGE –
CZECH IT OUT!**
see page 60

\$3.95

0 1 >



0 71896 47399 5



departments

4 | Talk to TH
Readers sound off
Historic trees and Big Tex

5 | Postcards
The Scene in Gruene
Honky-tonking and river recreation bring visitors to New Braunfels' Gruene Historic District, as do antiques stores and wine-tasting. *Plus:* The LBJ Presidential Library in Austin updates its image.

10 | TH Taste
Taking it from the Streets
Discover the heartening connection between one of Austin's most sought-after chefs and a no-frills Vietnamese deli.

13 | Weekender
Centering on Abilene
Abilene makes a great getaway for those looking for Western culture and big, beefy steaks. The zoo's pink flamingoes like it so much that they're expanding their flock.

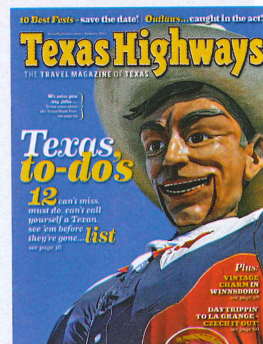
52 | Speaking of Texas
Swinging into Texas History
The Light Crust Doughboys, founded in 1931 by Bob Wills, continue to entertain fans with their unique brand of Western Swing. And it all started with a campaign to sell flour.

58 | TH Traveler
A roundup of January events
Houston artist Mark David Bradford brings his wild

sculptures to the Beeville Art Museum, plus 76 other fun things to see and do this month. Happy New Year!

60 | TH Daytripper
Vitáme Vás to La Grange
Chet Garner "Czechs" out La Grange, with its famed kolaches, barbecue, and live music at the Bugle Boy. It's the "best little day trip in Texas."

61 | Window on Texas
Confection Perfection
Photographers have a slew of clever tricks to bring out the best in their images. Photo Editor Griff Smith uses a hair dryer to melt imperfections in an assortment of chocolate.



About Our Covers

FRONT: Big Tex—the 52-foot-tall, denim-clad official greeter and oft-designated meeting spot at the State Fair of Texas in Dallas—succumbed to fire during the last days of the 2012 celebration. But fest organizers promise he'll be back for the 2013 extravaganza. **Photo courtesy Kevin Brown, State Fair of Texas**

BACK: Dedicated to human-powered puppetry, members of the Austin Bike Zoo brought their kinetic creations to last February's Chihuahuan Desert Bike Fest. **Photo © E. Dan Klepper**

Photographic Prints Available



Some images in this issue are available as prints in two distinctive formats. For more information, call toll-free 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.

01
13

Postcards

INSIDE: VIETNAMESE CUISINE: UPTOWN OR HOMESTYLE...10 ABILENE'S ATTRACTIONS...13



"I love traditional music—old songs that cross time and space to tell you what the people cared about," says Austin-based singer-songwriter Owen Temple.

See!

More on Gruene Hall
at texashighways.com/postcards

The Scene in Gruene

Secrets of New Braunfels' Gruene Historic District Text by **LORI MOFFATT**

SEATED AT AN OAK-SHADED picnic table overlooking the Guadalupe River, I'm digging into a tenderloin-and-spinach salad at the Gristmill Restaurant in the Gruene Historic District of New Braunfels and wondering what it must have been like here at the turn of the 20th Century. No composed

salads or Herradura margaritas, I'm betting—but there would have been plenty of cotton in the area, and all of it would have been ginned right here in Henry D. Gruene's gristmill, the bones of which today form the restaurant.

Cotton was once King in Gruene, as it was in much of Texas, and cotton is what

inspired an ambitious Henry Gruene—the second son of German immigrant Ernst Gruene—to bring in dozens of families in the 1870s to sharecrop the 6,000 fertile acres his family bought along the river. Eventually, Henry Gruene built homes, a post office, a general store, a bank, and a dance hall to cater to the men and

women who provided the muscle for his cotton enterprise. By all accounts, the town thrived (and H.D. made a fortune) until the boll weevil blight made a wreck of things in the 1920s and ushered in a slow decline.

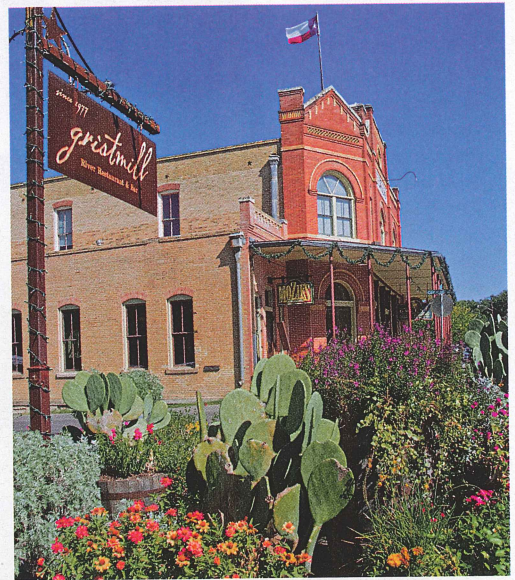
Today, though, the entire community—the 1878 dance hall and iconic Gruene water tower, dozens of shops and restaurants, a few hotels and B&Bs, a small winery, a day spa, and a serpentine, captivating stretch of the Guadalupe River—is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The entire historic district is easy to explore on foot; you can amble from one end of the district to the other in less than 15 minutes. In fact, Gruene still doesn't have (or need) a traffic light.

"We don't have a museum here in Gruene," says Dee Buck, co-owner of Buck Pottery, "so I always tell people to go over to Gruene Hall and look at the photos of all the people who have played there." Dee

Prickly-pear cactus and native cenizo brighten pathways throughout the Gruene Historic District. In the background is the Gruene Antique Company.

and his wife, Terry, arrived in Gruene in 1982 and transformed H.D. Gruene's storage barn into a pottery and retail shop. "That old dance hall is the heart and soul of this place," he says.

Dee Buck speaks the truth. Push open the squeaky screened door of Gruene Hall into the bar area, in fact, and you'll find at least 100 signed photographs of musicians who have played the hall over the years. Here is a veritable collage of country-music and rock-pop royalty, including publicity stills of Jimmie Vaughan, Lucinda Williams, Buddy Guy,



Merle Haggard, Lyle Lovett, Rosie Flores, Little Feat, Jerry Jeff Walker, Chris Isaak, and a young George Strait, who first played here with his Ace in the Hole band



The STARK Cultural Venues provide visitors with a wide variety of resources for the enjoyment of art, history, culture and nature. Small-town charm and world-class culture await in Orange, Texas.

Find yourself at the **STARK** Cultural Venues®

Stark Museum of Art • The W.H. Stark House • Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center • Lutchter Theater

www.starkculturalvenues.org

Programs of the Nelda C. and H.J. Lutchter Stark Foundation. © 2012 Nelda C. and H.J. Lutchter Stark Foundation. All Rights Reserved.

in 1975, when the hall reopened for business after a long slumber.

Gruene visionary Pat Molak kick-started the district's recovery in the mid-1970s when he and business partner Mary Jane Nalley bought the dance hall and began to restore the surrounding buildings, including the old gristmill. "We had our big coup in the fall of 1975," Pat says.

Grab a scoop of Blue Bell ice cream at the Gruene General Store, which used to be the community's post office.



Pink feathered boas and bedazzled Harley-Davidson sun visors are as easy to come by as vintage cowboy boots and 1930s apothecary jars.

"We had been having dances for four months, and we were hearing about a band in San Marcos called the Ace in the Hole band, led by a fellow named George Strait. We hired them for 150 bucks. They played here until the early 1980s, when George got his contract in Nashville."

"That was an interesting time," says Dee Buck. "Terry and I happened to visit Gruene in 1982, and we met Pat and Mary Jane, who had been buying up buildings and starting to lease them. They had already restored the gristmill and opened the restaurant, and of course there was Gruene Hall. We eventually decided to take a look at the old barn. There's a connection to history in Gruene that mirrors why we're attracted to the craft of pottery, which speaks of how people lived their everyday lives."

There's a comforting and invigorating

4 Gruene Game Plans

1 FLOAT A STRETCH of the **Guadalupe** (arrange equipment and logistics through Rockin' R River Rides). Pick up a Gruene T-shirt or a new hat at **Gruene Trading Company**, built in the 1880s as a home for H.D. Gruene's foreman. Have a pulled-pork sandwich and a Shiner Bock at the **Gristmill Restaurant**. Then go dancing or see live music at **Gruene Hall**. Stay at downtown New Braunfels' **Faust Hotel & Brewing Company** (rates start at \$99 per night).

2 START OFF WITH an espresso and a muffin at **Gruene Coffee Haus**. Spend a few hours exploring **Gruene Antique Company** (check out the antique vault, a relic from when the building was a bank), then inspect the cool fossils and geodes at **Natural**

Selections. Chow down on Shiner Bock onion rings and a Char-King burger at **Mozie's Bar and Grill**. Stay overnight at the **Gruene River Inn**, where private decks overlook the Guadalupe (rates start at \$145 per night).

3 SHOP FOR TOYS (finger puppets! boomerangs! disco balls! Oscar Wilde action figures!) at **Got Toys**, have a scoop of Blue Bell ice cream at the **Gruene General Store** (the original town post office), take a fly-fishing lesson from the pros at **Gruene Outfitters**, enjoy a plate of nachos at **Adobe Verde** (turn the kids loose at the playground), pose for an old-West family portrait at **Smiling Eyes Photo Gallery** (prices for four people start at \$51), then play a game of **horseshoes** at

Gruene Hall. Kid-friendly hotels abound in New Braunfels proper.

4 BOOK A MASSAGE at the **Gruene Day Spa**, then shop for something sparkly next door at **Hillbilly Chic**. Admire English and French country antiques (and look for ghosts) at **Black Swan Antiques**, then pick up a sturdy, beautiful coffee mug at **Buck Pottery**. Update your wardrobe with affordably priced, women's on-trend casual wear and accessories at **Simply Detailed**. Sample a flight of wines at **The Grapevine**—a wine shop and tasting room with a heavy focus on Texas wines—then tuck into a T-bone at the **Gristmill**. Stay overnight at the **Gruene Mansion Inn** (rates start at \$190 per night).

—Lori Moffatt

Postcards



The handmade wares at Buck Pottery—made from Texas clay—create a tangible link to place and history.

as a post office.

Across the street, amid the wooden boat proppers, 1933 Chicago World's Fair guides, malted-milk tins, and old postcards at the Gruene Antique Company, you can spy the gold-and-

owner Jim Benson, “but we’ve had quite a few reports. Most recently, we had an antique English kitchen scale in the back room, and customers told us the weights started bouncing. Another time, employees told me that they heard a bang, and that a 1920s minnow bucket appeared to have been thrown across the room.”

Perhaps that particular ghost simply wanted to go fishing: It’s hard to imagine that Gruene’s original founders would be unhappy with how things have turned out in their town. There’s live music here seven days a week, plentiful dining and drinking spots, river recreation in the warm months, and shopping opportunities to reflect nearly every aesthetic.

“Gruene is about rust and dust,” says Pat Molak. “Even as we expand, we use recycled and reclaimed materials, bury utility lines, landscape with native plants, and try to keep the old feel. If you sit on a bench in front of the dance hall facing the old mercantile building, you’ll forget what year it is.” **TH**

Gruene

For details, see www.gruenetexas.com and www.nbcham.org.



juxtaposition of old and new in Gruene, where pink feathered boas and bedazzled Harley-Davidson sun visors are as easy to come by as vintage cowboy boots and 1930s apothecary jars. And despite the historic district’s lack of a formal entity dedicated to telling its history, it’s easy to find evidence of 19th-Century Gruene if you know where to look—and listen.

Gruene still doesn’t have (or need) a traffic light.

Since most of the buildings here were built more than a century ago, wooden floors throughout the district squeak pleasantly beneath your footsteps; outside, gravel pathways trimmed with purple plumbago and lantana crunch rhythmically as you stroll from shop to shop. Inside the Gruene General Store, along with Davy Crockett coonskin caps and displays of personalized license plates, you’ll find a stack of vintage mailboxes that attest to the structure’s beginnings

The entire Gruene Historic District is easy to explore on foot.

black Victor Safe & Lock Co. vault that remains from the building’s days as a bank. The two-story Victorian Gruene Mansion Inn—once the home of Henry Gruene and his family—boasts broad, wraparound porches and a vintage Zenith radio in the dining room.

And down the street, the restored former home of Henry Gruene’s youngest daughter, now the site of Black Swan Antiques, is said to be haunted. “I’ve never encountered a ghost myself,” says shop

