



# KEEPERS *of*

# THE COOL

BY LYSSA MYSKA ALLEN, GREG LEVIN AND DAN GENTILE

Remember the first time you climbed down the steps to Barton Springs? Or up the steps to Mount Bonnell? Remember the first time you watched the bats take flight from beneath the Congress Avenue Bridge? Or saw a movie at the Paramount? There are tons of amazing things about Austin, but with all the travel guides, news stories, blogs, films, songs and books that pay homage to our hometown, it's hard to come up with original reasons to love the city. We, however, tracked down some old and new people, places, things and ideas that haven't gotten a lot of ink lately but capture the essence of Austin. Here are 30 more reasons why this is the coolest city on the planet.

Cozy up to Harvie, the slightly smelly taxidermied bear that poses at the Mohawk's Grizzly Bar. The often-dressed-up guardian of rock shows up in seemingly every party photo in town, making Harvie the unofficial Austin totem of cool.

PHOTOGRAPH BY Jay B Saucedo



## SIGN OF THE TIMES

Back in the 1940s and '50s, when cars were king and motor courts were mod, Austin's St-Elmo-Tel was a shining star at the intersection of South Congress and St. Elmo. Sadly, the motel gradually fell into disrepair and was finally demolished in 2007. But the funky motel sign still stands tall, eerily yet welcomingly advertising a vacant lot and acting as the gravestone for a ghost of pure Austin Americana.

PHOTOGRAPH BY Cody Hamilton

### GET MEDIEVAL

For rent: Bouldin Castle (yes, castle), just one mile from downtown and only a hop and a skip from South Congress. Owners Priscilla Glover and Ivan Spaller converted a Catholic missionary church into a medieval modern castle. You can play house—or kingdom—inside this architectural anomaly by renting it out. It has four huge bedrooms, each with its own immaculate bathroom, and a dining hall large enough to host a jousting tournament—or a cocktail party, if that's your thing. The castle even has a moat, sort of. It's a long narrow lap pool perfect for a moonlight swim following a regal soiree. "Guests needn't worry," says Glover. "We keep the dragon in the basement."



### THE HIDEAWAY

Only in a city like Austin can you find a sound control room that looks more like a backyard tree-

house. Make no mistake, Hideout Studios' (hideoutstudios.com) engineer Steve Mazur has worked with Diana Ross, Elton John, Steely Dan, Ben Kweller, Norah Jones and more, so the leafy getaway isn't just some rookie setup. Mark Cravotta created the studio so he'd have a place to record his own music "when we're caught up on sleep from raising babies," explains his wife, Monica. But like the Barton Heights oasis where it sits, Hideout grew, attracting national acts with its commitment to putting music before money and a setting that inspires them to sing its praises.

### MEATY MONDAYS

There's a wealth of culinary creativity in town, and once a month, some of the city's top chefs gather for Meaty Mondays. Zack Northcutt of Mulberry, Ben McBride of Perla's and Will Packwood, the former Cibo and 7 chef who recently launched La Tavola catering, are just some of the chefs who rise to the challenge the first Monday of each month and bring their take on a predetermined meat to Northcutt's house. Want an invite to this dinner party? Sorry, this is just for the kitchen crew. But imagine being a fly on that wall. "We've done briskets and baby backs, veal, fish, suckling



pig and cabrito," says Izzoz Tacos owner Chef John Galindo. "I was watching the Monday night game and thought, hmm, game night ... wild game!" Hence, November's "Game Night" theme. Game on!

### SWINGERS

Texans are famous for two-step-pin', but swingin', too? Turns out Austin is home to one of the top swing dance scenes in the nation. Dancers can try their hands—er, feet—at spots like Ruta Maya and the Continental Club on Monday nights, the Texas Federation of Women's Club on Tuesdays and Thursdays and the Engine Room the third Saturday of each month, to name just a few. Rookies need not be shy, for these fancy-footed folks welcome newcomers, whether they're flying solo or in pairs. To get into the swing of things, check out thelindyproject.com or austinswingsyndicate.org.

### DANCING IN THE STREET

Who needs a club to get the party started? Or even a crowd, for that matter? DJ Manny (myspace.com/mannydroid2000), voted the best party DJ this year by *The Austin Chronicle*, brings the beat on the road. With the help of a bicycle mechanic, Manuel Muniz replaced the backseat of a pedicab with a sound system and mobile DJ rig, creating a music chariot that lets him spark impromptu dance parties in the streets. Music for the masses—Rock on, Manny.

### THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS

The Grand Ole Opry, the Country Music Awards, a tour with Willie Nelson and Asleep at the Wheel—these are the dreams of any musician. But Ruby Jane, the 15-year-old fiddle-playing phenom (therubyjaneshow.com),



### WILD HORN

John Chiles was a much-heralded Longhorn back-up quarterback who moved to receiver this year. But it wasn't until the team put in its Wild Horn formation—with Chiles and QB Colt McCoy switching between quarterback and receiver on the field—that Chiles' versatility shone. Will the junior step into McCoy's golden cleats next year, or will the 'Horns put freshman QB Garrett Gilbert in McCoy's spot to keep the Wild Horn in place? Either way, it looks like the next in a long line of UT heroes is ready to take the field.

has already accomplished all that and more. Though she's only been in Austin for two years, Miss Jane might as well be a native, with her propensity to pop up on just about any stage in town. She's played everywhere from Antone's to ACL Fest, jammed with everyone from Lyle Lovett to Bob Schneider and has caught the attention of *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, CBS Evening News and more. What's left? Retirement at age 20? Don't bet on it. Chances are we've only just begun to hear from little Ruby Jane.



### HOME SWEET HOME

Austin is known for its eclectic mix of green neighborhoods, vintage Craftsman bungalows, '50s ranches and art deco domiciles. But only here can you find an abundance of homes like the one above thrown into the mix. Aralyn Hughes' old house may no longer scream "Keep Austin Weird" to MoPac drivers, but plenty of gloriously unique houses are doing their part.



### BOOK PEOPLE

A city full of creatives is bound to generate some cool ideas. That was the plan behind Austin Makes a Book. For \$30, Austinites could fill one of 100 pages of a book with content of their choosing—a story, cartoon, haiku. Proceeds benefited Room to Read, which helps establish schools and libraries around the world. The city's creative—and charitable—energy is now in black and white.



### TEXAS RANGER

Most fight swine flu with hand sanitizer, but Ranger is using its power to destroy the bug for good. Ranger is the \$30 million supercomputer at UT that's testing the spread and treatments of the virus. When it's not being used to better public health, it's simulating black holes, earthquakes and the passage of sound waves through the human skull. You know, simple, everyday stuff.



### STEAMY AFFAIR

Some of the coolest things are served piping hot. Take the Soup Peddler's hearty offerings. What started with a guy on a mission—and a bike—to deliver soup to the cool folks in town turned into an international sensation. You'll drool over these chowders, stews and broths. Order online for delivery or pickup the following week (souppeddler.com). Abide by this rule, or no soup for you!

PHOTOS COURTESY: STUDIO; HIDEOUT; BOOK; NEEDLE AND SOUP; ISTOCK.

PHOTOS BY: CHILES; MATT HEMPEL/UT ATHLETICS; RUBY JANE; JOBELLE SMITH.

## ROOM SERVICE

Get a room! You'll be happy you did, as the KimberModern hotel ([kimbermodern.com](http://kimbermodern.com)) has completed Austin's holy trinity of hotel über-coolness. We already had plenty to boast about with the artsy Hotel Saint Cecilia and the tragically hip Hotel San Jose. Now there's KimberModern, with its magnificent minimalist lines.

Set in the heart of the "04," it still manages to feel secluded. So if those holiday houseguests overstay their welcome, you know where to send them.

PHOTOGRAPH BY Casey Dunn





## DARN GOOD GRUB

The run-down shack that houses the East Side's best live music venue was once on the Chitlin' Circuit when bars were still segregated. Today, TC's Lounge ([myspace.com/tcswednesdays](http://myspace.com/tcswednesdays)) has music five days a week, from blues to soul to funk. A \$5 cover gets you in the door and a plate of Baby Girl's soul food (chili, ribs, red beans and rice). You can buy beer or bring in your own liquor or wine. When everyone gets dancing, the A/C-less joint gets hot, but it's the good kind of steamy.

## THE SMILE CIRCUIT

Twenty years ago, Austin dentist Richard R. Garza grew frustrated after seeing too many kids suffer from the ravages of dental disease because their families couldn't afford care. So he set out in an 18-wheeler and started offering free three-day dental clinics at PGA and Champions tour events



**BOWL 'EM OVER**  
Let's say you wanted to bowl, grab a burger and drinks and catch a band after karaokeing yourself hoarse, all in one place. Normally, you'd be plum out of luck, but Tim and Karrie League have remedied this shortcoming. The Highball ([thehighball.com](http://thehighball.com)), a retro bowling alley, diner and lounge, is the brainchild of the Alamo's owners, who once solved another problem: The inability to grab a burger and drinks and sing along to heavy metal ballad videos after enjoying a sci-fi double feature, all in one place.

for children without access to oral health care. Garza hit a hole in one. As golfers line up for 48-foot chip shots, kids line up outside the 48-foot-long Christina's Smile ([csmile.com](http://csmile.com)) trailer. About 120 kids from ages 6 to 15 receive everything from cleanings to root canals at each clinic. Christina's Smile supporters comprise a who's who of golf pros, and 18 dentists from each community volunteer their time and staff, snagging tickets to the tournaments as thanks. Now, that's something to smile about.

## OFFICE ROMANCE

It's anything but business as usual at Penn Field, the classically cool office park at 3601 South Congress. Since this World War I airfield was rehabbed in 2000, it has attracted some of the most creative minds in the city with its marriage of historic architecture and modern design. The single-story stone

barracks, mess hall and airplane hangars built in 1918 on the site of Austin's first landing strip are now home to music makers, photo takers and design movers and shakers. Touches like the old water tower hovering above the site and the native plantings inspire the work of tenants like the Design Center of Austin showrooms, the Gibson Guitar Center, the Texas chapter of The Recording Academy, the Austin Playhouse and Opal Divine's. It's about as far from Dunder Mifflin as you can get.

## THE WRITE STUFF

The journal that led to Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Woodward and Bernstein's Watergate notes, the world's first photograph—The University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center is constantly bringing high-profile finds to Austin. But it's the little things that make the Ransom Center a powerhouse

of cool. Its random collection of personal effects are usually kept in storage, but they do make it into the displays on a rotating basis. Right now, for instance, you can see a lock of Edgar Allan Poe's hair, which he gave in a brooch to his childhood sweetheart not long before his mysterious and premature death. Other treasures lurking in the storerooms include Gloria Swanson's tortoiseshell sunglasses, a champagne bottle from Pablo Picasso's wedding, Erle Stanley Gardner's collection of honorary police badges and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's socks.

## A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

One minute you're cruising The Drag, eating Dirty Martin's burgers with UT students, and the next you're driving past historic, stately homes with boulevards and vast stretches of parkland. Welcome to Hemphill, a teeny neighborhood that spans 27th to 38th streets from Duval to Guadalupe. Neighborhood founder Mirabeau B. Lamar left this central 68 acres after a few years living there because it was too dangerous due to raiding Comanches. But once Hemphill became a public park, all sorts of well-heeled types started moving in and making themselves at home. If you're looking for a cool respite, 32nd Street may just become your new drag.

## PET PROJECT

No... kill... city. Those three words keep the staff and volunteers at Austin Pets Alive! combing the euthanasia list at Town Lake Animal Shelter to find families for the city's homeless animals. APA ([austinpetsalive.org](http://austinpetsalive.org)) also educates pet owners about the alternatives to dropping their pets off at kill shelters, and it empowers animal lovers to foster pets. In less than a year and a half, APA has saved more than 2,500 pets, and it stands to surpass that number in the future, thanks to an Animal Resource Center in the works. The new facility will offer a hotline, spay-and-neuter services, rescue and foster care, on-site adoptions and temporary shelter for emergencies. A no-kill city—imagine that!

PHOTOGRAPH BY Clare Fore



## HUNGER ARTIST

Alan Graham says he'd make a terrible employee. He's anything but a sit-at-the-desk-and-focus kind of guy. But Graham has these visions. Eleven years ago, he turned his vision of catering trucks heading out to the streets to feed the hungry into Mobile Loaves and Fishes. He had another vision five years ago of RV homes in a community with a gym, Internet access, sustainable food gardens and job assistance. His vision of providing permanent "homes" to the homeless, as opposed to transitional housing, is becoming a reality, with hopes to break ground in 2010 on Jennifer Gale Village. "What we're going to put on the ground," Graham says, "every city will want to bottle up and bring home." Envision that.

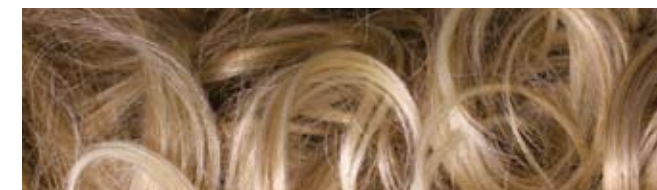
## THE BLUE PERIOD

For years, savvy Austinites have eschewed the holiday masses at the malls in favor of more aesthetic and soulful gifts at the Blue Genie Art Bazaar ([bluegenieart.com/art\\_bazaar\\_2009.html](http://bluegenieart.com/art_bazaar_2009.html)). And while the Blue Genie features works in a range of media from dozens of talented local artists, Alicia Traveria's dark yet delectable illustrations stand out from the pack, as do her odd little stuffed animals ("creepy but cute," says she). "My intent is to create pieces of art that interest and entertain people as much as they do me when I'm making them,"



## FOOD GROUP

A leisurely 10-course dinner of fresh meats and produce, set amid vast lush gardens. Tuscany? No, try East Austin, at the home of Dai Due Supper Club founder Chef Jesse Griffiths (the setting varies). The food is prepared with local ingredients, and to remind you that this is Austin, a folk, jazz or classical group strums away at the end of a long table of diners. The BYOB policy enhances the merrymaking and is just another detail that makes Dai Due so popular (reserve well in advance). Cost is \$45 per person and up. [daidueaustin.com](http://daidueaustin.com)



## CURLY GIRLS CLUB

When curly-headed Austinites Gretchen Heber and Michelle Breyer launched [naturallycurly.com](http://naturallycurly.com) 11 years ago, they were doing what many of us only dream about: following a passion. The site exploded and has since become the go-to place on the Web for both curly-girlies around the world and the companies that make products for them. Heber and Breyer follow in a long line of Austin entrepreneurs who are living proof that work can be fun—and insanely rewarding. They insist the secret to their success is simple: "A lot of curls—a lot of room to grow."



### COTTAGE INDUSTRY

The 20 or so cottages on Wilson Street in South Austin are not much to look at, but that isn't why Carolyn Wonderland and, rumor has it, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Lucinda Williams called the place home. The Wilson Street Cottages comprise a tiny enclave where, for decades, some of our city's most noted musicians have lived. There's a sense of community there, where neighborhood pot-lucks, bonfires and jam sessions last all night, and nobody seems to care. Plus, it's an affordable place for musicians to live, at around \$600 a month. Developers have moved closer in recent years to building condos on the property, but its residents are fighting to keep the place alive as a landmark of Austin music history.

### DEAR DIARY

It's cool to be formerly uncool, especially if you're willing to share all the grody, cringe-worthy details. A few brave souls are more than just willing; they've started an Austin chapter of *Mortified*, the confessional theater show that features regular folks playing show-and-tell with their childhood diaries, dioramas and dramas. The occasional show pops up every few months (you can check it out at the Alamo-Ritz on Dec. 16), and performers are chosen by audition. The performances are no artifice, however. The love poems written in scented pen and sung to the tune of "Stairway to Heaven" and the tear-stained journal entries by tough-as-nails football heroes are the unedited works of the performers' childhood selves. ☘

says Traveria (ayahdesign.com). Kevin Collins, co-director at the Blue Genie Art Bazaar certainly agrees. "We are very lucky to have somebody as talented as Alicia represented here," he says.



### HE'S A MEAT MAN, MA'AM

Don Breedlove's surname is his calling. That's clear the moment you approach the meat counter at Central Market Westgate. Breedlove takes his sweet Texas time chatting up customers about whatever cuts they fancy, and he hands out candies from his butcher's frock—just because. Breedlove is the Santa Claus of carnivores, with his ever-present smile and scruffy white beard. Vegetarians beware: You might just fall victim to his charm and cross over to the other side.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
Clare Fore

### GET THOSE BOOTS A TAPPIN'

If you're trying to make it in the music industry, who would you rather get advice from, the guys in the garage band next door or Lloyd Maines? The Austin Music Foundation holds Music Industry Boot Camps where folks like Carolyn Wonderland, Jack Ingram and Jon Dee Graham tell it like it is. The boot camps are free; just show up, listen and prepare for life as a rock star. Seminars cover everything from making money to online promotion to proper disposal of undergarments tossed on stage. Sorry, just kidding on that last one. For more information, go to [austinmusicfoundation.org](http://austinmusicfoundation.org).



Sip responsibly. 40% ALC/VOL (80 PROOF) AND 50% ALC/VOL (100 PROOF) VODKA. 100% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS. IMPORTED BY GREY GOOSE VODKA, LLC, WOODBRIDGE, VA. © 2009 GREY GOOSE VODKA, LLC.

### ON DISCERNING TASTE

## LATE NIGHT DINING

THERE'S SOMETHING WONDERFUL about a late night dinner, when no reservations are needed. The intimacy. The company of insiders. The spontaneous swapping of stories and seats at the table. The impromptu pleasure of lingering over a meal long after the day players have gone to bed.



[WWW.GREYGOOSE.COM](http://WWW.GREYGOOSE.COM)

COTTAGE PHOTO BY CHARLIE FAYE.