

# ELLEDECOR

## Style & Substance

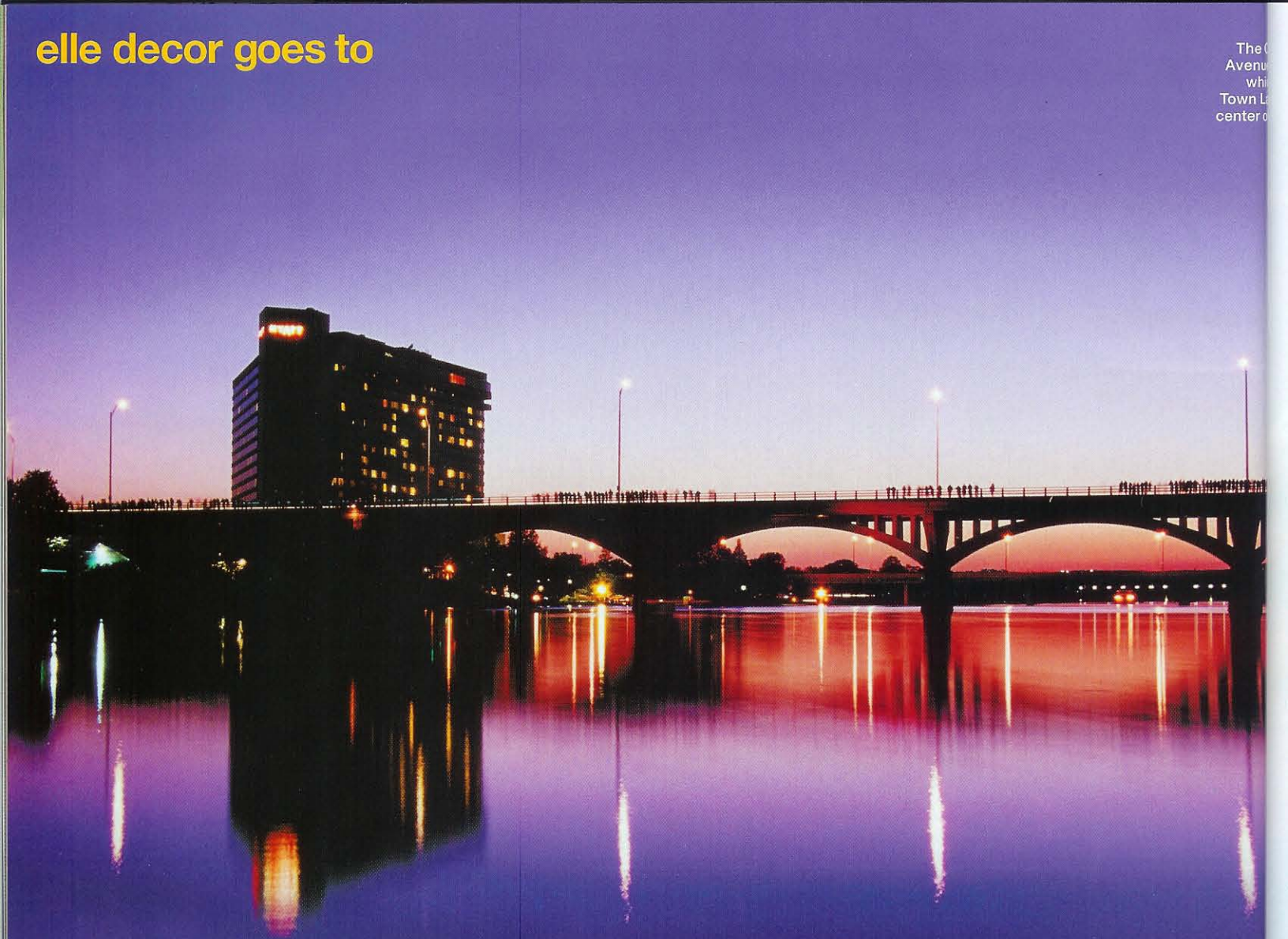
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# Austin

With its bohemian vibe, world-class music scene, and cultural riches, the state capital both embraces Texas traditions and breaks with them. By Jay Jennings

On a typically sunny Saturday morning in Austin, Texas, joggers, bikers, and walkers are traversing the path around Town Lake, the community's geographical center and center of activity just as Central Park is Manhattan's. Viewing the scene through the plate-glass windows of her eight-day-old home-furnishings store, Loft, is Kelly Judd Schwartz, an interior designer who worked for years in Los Angeles before returning to her hometown and opening the shop. As if on cue, a young woman in a stylish sweat suit strides through the doors and excitedly says, "I need help! I just bought a place downtown, and I've never had to furnish an open loft space before." The scene is one Schwartz is hoping will be repeated often, and if the construction cranes, store openings, and a real-estate market described in the local paper as "sizzling" (like a plate of fajitas) are any indication, the demand for Schwartz's

clean-lined goods from designers like Barclay Butera and James Murphy is likely to be *caliente* as well.

Like many Austin expats, Schwartz had vowed to return, and the lures that draw them back are appealing to travelers as well. The rolling slopes of Texas's Hill Country—which provided the scenic training ground for seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong and is the home of challenging golf courses like those at Barton Creek Resort & Spa—make for contemplative riding on two wheels or four. The shores of the 1,600-acre Lake Austin, just west of town, feature trails through oak and juniper forests and one of the nation's top-rated spas, Lake Austin Spa Resort. As the site of both the State Capitol and the University of Texas, Austin draws an educated, active, and creative yet laid-back populace. The locals support progressive politics, bohemian stores, >



The State Capitol, made of sunset-red Texas granite.

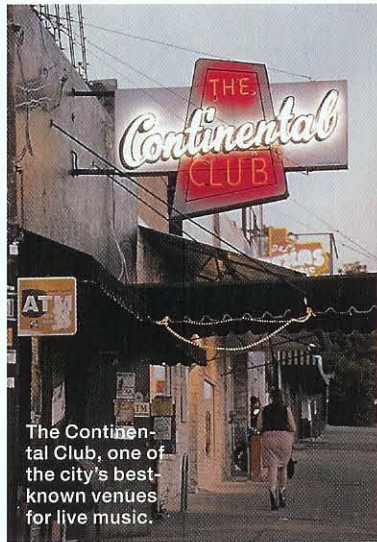
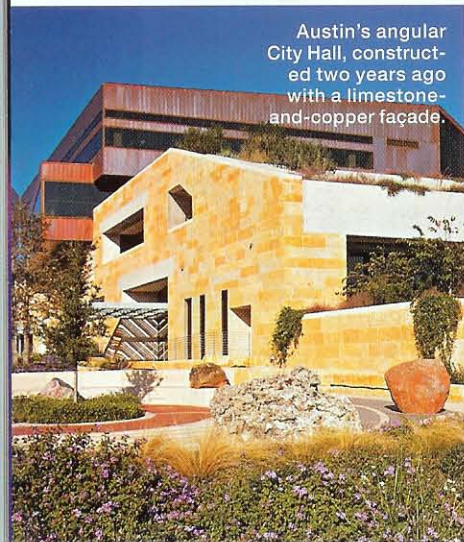


a wealth of restaurants, and, most of all, live music. As Austin's population has skyrocketed (from just under half a million in 1990 to over 700,000 in 2005), it's not only become easier to get to (there are numerous direct flights of about three to four hours from hubs on both coasts), it's also acquired a sharper edge of urban sophistication.

As always, the University of Texas, which sits north of the State Capitol building and plants 50,000 students in the town, still provides much of Austin's cultural focus. The school can brag not just about its national football champion Longhorns but also about its top-rank cultural institutions: the recently renovated Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, with 40 million photographs, artifacts, works of art, and manuscripts, including a Gutenberg Bible; and the Blanton Museum of Art, which has world-class holdings in Latin American art, as well as Old Master paintings, and just consolidated its collection in a brand-new Spanish colonial-style building.

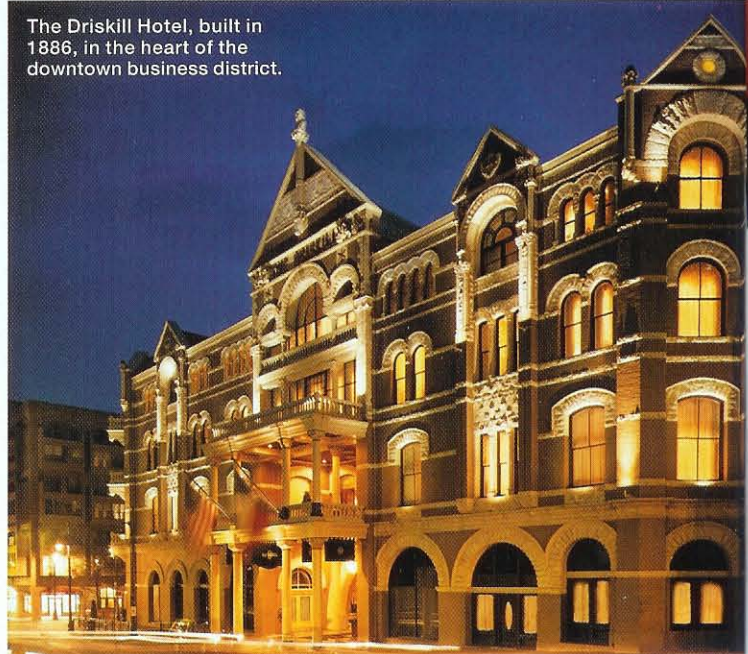
In the area south from the Capitol to Town Lake, which is actually part of the dammed-up Colorado River, a formerly dormant downtown has begun sprouting condo developments, independent and national retail stores, and a variety of restaurants, all of which seem to be on board with the city council's initiatives to promote a concentration of walkable attractions and stores. (East of Congress Avenue, which runs directly south from the Capitol building, the long-standing bar and music strip of 6th Street has always been lively, frequented by UT students and, recently, the drunken housemates of MTV's *The Real World: Austin*.) Newest among the emerging retail/residential areas is the 2nd Street District, a nascent design center, where the 2004 limestone City Hall building boasts copper cladding and an overhang that resembles a stylized armadillo tail. Nearby, in addition to Loft, (text continues on page 112) >

Austin's angular City Hall, constructed two years ago with a limestone-and-copper façade.



The Continental Club, one of the city's best-known venues for live music.

The Driskill Hotel, built in 1886, in the heart of the downtown business district.



Blackmail, a boutique that stocks all things black.



The storefront of Enoteca Vespaio, an Italian restaurant and takeout shop.





**Essential Austin**

The area code is 512.  
**Hit the music scene.** Some 220 venues, including the Continental Club, Antone's, and La Zona Rosa, offer live music, from Texas swing to folk to punk. And the annual South by Southwest festival brings 1,400 musicians to town.  
**Bike, stroll, or jog** the paths surrounding Town Lake. The home of Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong is awash in outdoor activity.  
**Explore SoCo.** What Neiman Marcus is for Dallas socialites, South Congress Avenue is for Austin's vintage-craving hipsters. In addition to the sleek Hotel San José, the area offers stores galore, like old-school Allens Boots and stylish Blackmail (all black clothes), and dining options such as Vespaio and South Congress Cafe. On the first Thursday of the month, stores stay open until 10 P.M.  
**Dive in and a drive-in.** Barton Springs Pool (476-9044) on the edge of town is a longtime favorite for a dip on a hot day—the springwater that fills it stays at 68 degrees. On the way back, hit P. Terry's

(pterrys.com), a tiny spot that serves hormone-free beef and veggie burgers, typical of Austin's progressive style.

**What to See**

**Arthouse, 700 Congress Ave., 453-5312;** arthousetexas.org: This nonprofit exhibition space shows cutting-edge work, such as the recent matchup of young artists Jeremy Blake and Dario Robleto.  
**Austin Museum of Art, 823 Congress Ave., 495-9224;** amoa.org: Despite the redundant motto ("We're Austin's Museum of Art!"), the centrally located institution hosts popular shows like the one this spring on Christo and Jeanne-Claude.  
**Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas, 200 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., 471-7324;** blantonmuseum.org: One of the largest university art galleries in the country, full of Old Master paintings and Latin American art.  
**Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, 300 W. 21st St., 471-8944;** hrc.utexas.edu: One of the country's richest collections of manuscripts and photographs, including papers from

Joyce and Hemingway; the center also presents temporary exhibitions such as the current "Technologies of Writing" (through August 6).  
**Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave., 292-4100;** wildflower.org: The former first lady, an ardent conservationist now 93, endowed this path-filled botanical garden.  
**Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum, University of Texas, 2313 Red River St., 721-0200;** lbjlib.utexas.com: The 1971 Gordon Bunshaft building houses 50,000 artifacts of LBJ's career.

**Where to Stay**

**The Driskill Hotel, 604 Brazos St., 800-252-9367;** driskillhotel.com: The Old West decor, complete with cowboy art, cowhide barstools, and six-shooter sconces, evokes 19th-century Texas history and oilman opulence without slighting 21st-century amenities. And it's only steps from the 6th Street bars.  
**Four Seasons Hotel Austin, 98 San Jacinto Blvd., 478-4500;** fourseasons.com/austin: Ask for a room overlooking Town Lake and watch the scullers stroke by. The lobby bar is a local scene, and the restaurant is one of Austin's best.  
**Hotel San José, 1316 S. Congress Ave., 800-574-8897;** sanjosehotel.com: Deep in the heart of SoCo, this onetime motor court has been transformed into Austin's most stylish digs, favored by rock 'n' rollers and movie stars like Gwyneth Paltrow. Plus, there's a killer courtyard for drinks.  
**Lake Austin Spa Resort, 1705 S. Quinlan Park Rd., 800-847-5637;** lakeaustin.com: One of the nation's top spas with 40 homey suites fronting the peaceful lake; you can indulge in an extended stay or a day-trip treatment.

**Where to Eat**

**Enoteca Vespaio, 1610 S. Congress Ave., 441-7672:** The next-door offshoot of Austin's most authentic Italian place, it's quieter but offers equally good pastas and a banner Sunday brunch.  
**Iron Works Barbecue, 100 Red River St., 478-4855;** ironworksbbq.com: Rolls of paper towels for daubing the juices from the delicious brisket adorn the tables in this historic, slightly run-down shack by the convention center. Native Texan Luke Wilson likes it.  
**Jeffrey's, 1204 W. Lynn St., 477-5584;** jeffreysfaustin.com: After 30 years, this is still Austin's swankest place to dine, serving dishes like peppered venison with a huckleberry port sauce.  
**Jo's, 1300 S. Congress Ave., 444-3800;** joscoffee.com: Hangout central for Austin's bohos; there's a new, more refined branch in the 2nd Street District.  
**Polvo's, 2004 S. 1st St., 441-5446;** polvos.citysearch.com: Hearty Mexican fare in a low-key setting, with patio seating. Augment your chili con queso, an Austin staple, with jalapeños, ground beef, and other fixings, then savor the chili relleno smothered in pecan sauce.  
**Ranch 616, 616 Nueces St., 479-7616:** Kevin Williamson's roadhouse mixes the casual and the upscale, with live Texas-

swing music, a huge mural of an old cowboy band by local artist Bob "Daddy-O" Wade, and such satisfying Western fare as steaks and fried chicken, turned up a notch.  
**Uchi, 801 S. Lamar Blvd., 916-4808;** uchiaustin.com: Reservations are crucial, as this sushi place is packed with Austin's blond and beautiful, who share maguro sashimi with goat cheese and green tomatoes fried in *panko*. Don't miss it.

**Where to Shop**

**Allens Boots, 1522 S. Congress Ave., 447-1413;** allensboots.com: Unquestionably the place for traditional cowboy boots, jeans, and other Western wear.  
**Big Red Sun, 1102 E. Cesar Chavez St., 480-0688;** bigredsun.com: More than a nursery, Big Red Sun does landscape design and stocks children's clothes, artisanal pottery, and furniture.  
**Blackmail, 1202 S. Congress Ave., 326-7670;** blackmailboutique.com: The Man in Black (Johnny Cash) will most likely be on the sound system in this cool clothing store that specializes in all things noir.  
**By George, 524 N. Lamar Blvd., 472-5951;** bygeorgeaustin.com: A fashion-forward specialty store, where both male and female clotheshorses will find jeans (Seven, AG, Loomstate) that will never see a saddle, along with jewelry, shoes, and other designer accessories.  
**Kick Pleat, 910 S. 1st St., 445-4500;** kickpleat.com: Started by a rogue executive from nearby Dell Computers who thought Austin style could use a reboot, Kick Pleat carries dresses by Vena Cava and shoes by Tara Subkoff in the emerging South 1st Street strip.  
**Loft, 416 W. Cesar Chavez St., 377-6810;** loftthomedecor.com: Clean-lined furniture (much of it destined for downtown's burgeoning condo buildings), selected by former L.A. interior designer (and Austin native) Kelly Judd Schwartz.  
**Mercury Design Studio, 209 W. 2nd St., 236-0100:** The eclectic goods in this new home store are displayed in beautifully composed room settings.  
**Milk + Honey, 204 Colorado St., 236-1115;** milkandhoneyspa.com: This spanking-new day spa serves up treatments in a peaceful, earth-tone space.  
**Roadhouse Relics, 1720 S. 1st St., 442-6366;** roadhouserelics.com: Vintage and new neon signs that capture the flavor of Texas's long, lonesome highways.  
**Uncommon Objects, 1512 S. Congress Ave., 442-4000;** uncommonobjects.com: A mall of antiques and collectibles dealers where you'll find Lone Star State trinkets as well as vintage clothes.  
**Waterloo Records, 600A N. Lamar Blvd., 474-2500;** waterloorecords.com: An essential spot for the local music you may have heard live the night before, as well as concert tickets and T-shirts.  
**Whole Foods, 525 N. Lamar Blvd., 476-1206;** wholefoods.com: Founded in Austin in 1980, the company opened this 80,000-square-foot flagship a year ago, and it's as much a tourist attraction as it is a source of organic groceries and cosmetics for the locals.

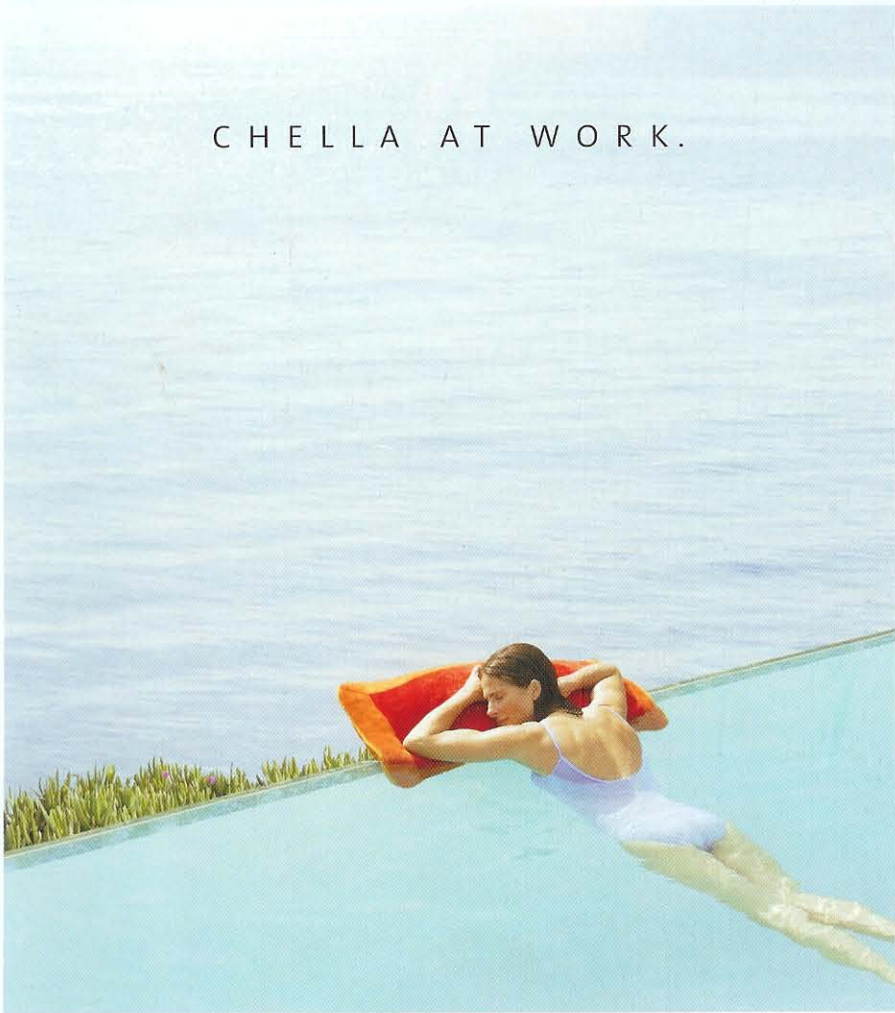


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A verdant Barton Creek golf course.

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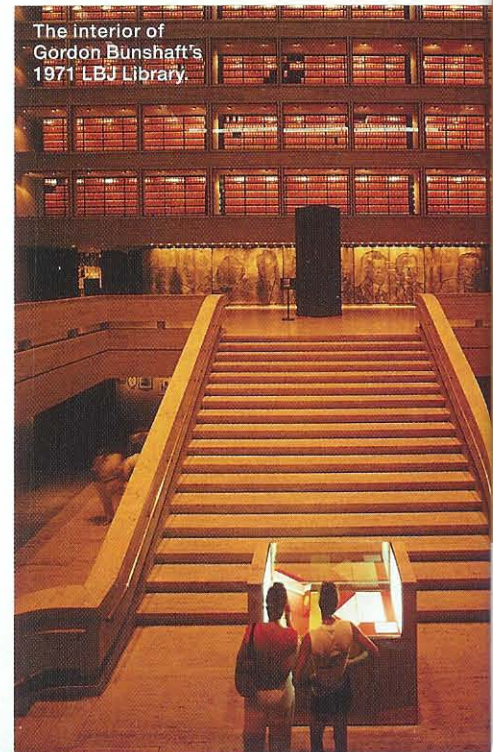
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are the year-old Design Within Reach store, whose employees will conveniently tote samples up to the newly built condos above, and the Milk + Honey spa, where weary workers and shoppers can be pampered. Sidewalks along 2nd Street have been widened to encourage wanderers to discover quirky new shops like Mercury Design Studio, where a series of eclectic, stylish alcoves show off merchandise by Jonathan Adler and Thomas Paul, as well as vintage pieces. As prolific local architect Dick Clark says over a plate of fried frog legs at downtown restaurant Ranch 616, "It's a town that's becoming a city."

Clark himself is at the center of that development. "I get a buzz out of going to work every day," he says. In addition to producing work for boldface Texas clients like Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker, Clark has become the go-to guy for restaurant design. Among his recent creations are the minimalist but brightly colored Mediterranean spot Fino; the sleek, see-and-be-seen Asian restaurant Kenichi; >



The interior of Gordon Bunshaft's 1971 LBJ Library.





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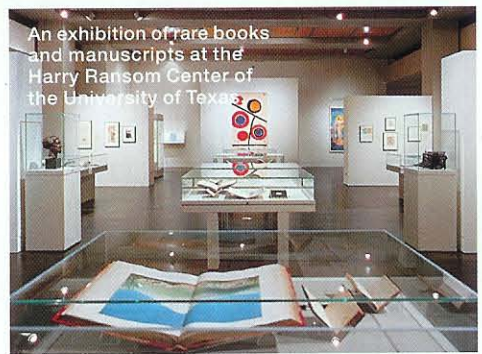
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## austin

and French bistro Capitol Brasserie, with its "Balthazar rip-off" design, as he puts it with winning directness. His firm's projects extend north to the university area (the retail and condo development Guadalupe 31) and south to a similar complex on South Congress, the trendy strip known as SoCo.

That project, now under construction, is part of SoCo's "second wave" of development, according to Liz Lambert, who sparked the first round six years ago when she unveiled her radically refurbished 1939 motor court, the Hotel San José, in an area better known for red lights and risky behavior than for star sightings like sometime guest Gwyneth Paltrow. Now, it's the hippest place to stay in town and its courtyard is a happening lounge scene. With blocky, reclaimed-pine furnishings that seem borrowed from Donald Judd's minimalist vocabulary (indeed, Lambert also designed a hotel in Judd's adopted home, Marfa) and cowhide throw rugs on cement floors, the rooms initially scared off more than a few UT alums in for a game, but the hotel quickly found a following among Austin's parade of touring musicians and the bohemians who love them.

The San José is the place to start for exploring SoCo's range of funky shops. Most of the retail is on the west side of the street and can be canvassed in an afternoon, with a stop for brunch at the sleek South Congress Cafe, for superior Italian food at Vespaio and its more casual cousin Enoteca Vespaio, for tacos and margaritas at Güero's, or for just a shot of caf-



feine at Jo's, the coffee-hut hangout in the parking lot of the San José. Vintage-fashion seekers haunt New Bohemia, and vintage-everything lovers spend hours scouring Uncommon Objects for the whole kitsch and caboodle. More focused are the sister stores Blackmail (which traffics in all things black and has a great supply of used boots as well) and, connected by an internal doorway, Vivid, where black is banished in favor of bright hues; both carry clothes, housewares, and accessories. In a more typical Texas vein, the aisles of Allens Boots, which opened nearly 30 years ago, hold a phalanx of pointy-toed footwear, both low-key and over the top.

The one note of lament in Lambert's Austin encomiums is the fear that South Congress, once the last outpost of, as she says, "funky old Austin," is now becoming "more polished funky." She holds herself partly responsible with her trendy hotel. "I recognize the irony of it," she says. That fear also informs the omni- ▶



South Congress Avenue packed with specialty shops.



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The booming downtown.

present T-shirt slogan KEEP AUSTIN WEIRD. While Lambert will soon be fighting high-trendy competition, as Kimpton and W hotels prepare to enter the Austin market, she also relishes the spread of stores and restaurants inspired by individual visions to other neighborhoods: the East Side's authentic Mexican food at the diner Juan in a Million and unusual garden/department store Big Red Sun; on South 1st Street, the arrival of boutiques like Kick Pleat; and on South Lamar Boulevard, the sushi creations at Uchi which earned 32-year-old chef Tyson Cole a 2005 Best New Chef award from *Food & Wine* magazine.

Pulsing all over town is Austin's music scene. The city promotes itself as the live-music capital of the world, and with some 220 venues, it's hard to argue with that label. On almost any night, one can find a place to hear nearly everything: punk and indie bands at Emo's; traditional country with two-stepping at the Broken Spoke; and national touring acts at La Zona Rosa, the Continental Club, and Stubb's. The city reaches critical live-music mass every March when the South by Southwest festival (SXSW) brings 1,400 musicians to town for a week. Started in 1987 as a music-only event, the conference has expanded to include film and video and high-tech conferences as well. Should you choose to miss SXSW (and many people do, given the crowds), you can always opt for the less hectic Austin City Limits festival (which is televised on PBS), held every September in Zilker Park or, at any time, seek out CDs in the pilgrimage-worthy independent music store Waterloo Records, which features an entire wall of discs by local artists. ▶



Fenwick Carriage Lantern, designed by Charleston designer Michael Amato.

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The pool at the Lake Austin Spa Resort.



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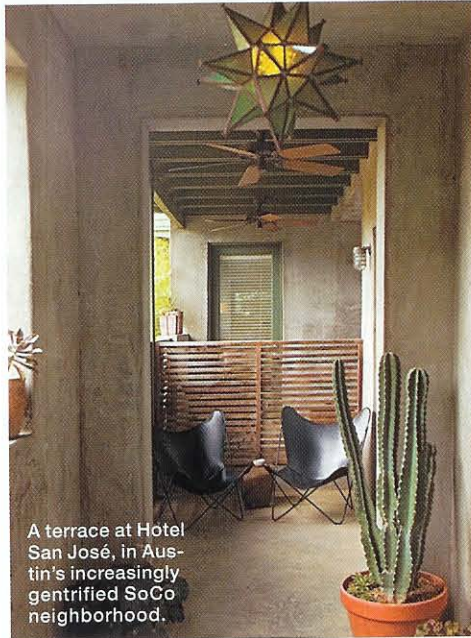


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## austin



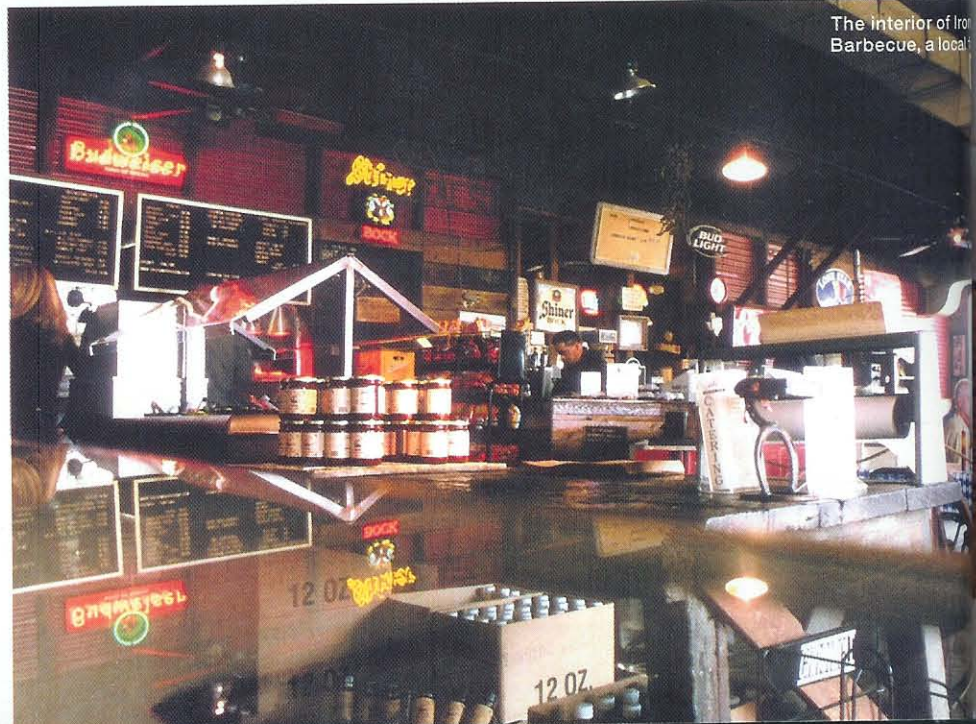
A terrace at Hotel San José, in Austin's increasingly gentrified SoCo neighborhood.

Waterloo sits at the northwest corner of the intersection of Lamar Boulevard and 6th Street, which forms an "X marks the spot" for Austin's independent spirit. On the northeast corner, the presence of the top-notch independent bookstore BookPeople, the largest in Texas, has given Austinites a local alternative to Barnes & Noble. The southwest corner is devoted to retail stores, including the expertly curated men's and women's clothing store By George, a fixture in Austin since 1977 (and open in this location since 2000), with clothes by Erica Tanov, jewelry by Jill Platner, and shirts by Dries Van Noten; it's both undeniably Texan and stylishly international. On the

remaining corner, the southeast, is a store that has become a tourist attraction and a necessary anchor and magnet for downtown's revival, especially for the surge of residential development—the 80,000-square-foot flagship store and corporate offices for Whole Foods Market, with a half dozen specialty-food bars and a sprawling patio with table seating and a water feature.

Founded in Austin in 1980, Whole Foods might be the best representative of booming Austin's appeal—and its dilemma. The store is progressive and organic, much like Austin itself, but it's still mammoth. While it's no Wal-Mart and has been a key attraction in inspiring locals to move back downtown, the question remains whether, by virtue of its very size, it might drive out smaller stores; the same question surrounds the planned IKEA 20 miles to the north, which could damage smaller, local home-furnishings stores.

Chances are Austin will protect the little guy; the city council has already passed a measure against McMansion-building in some of the old small-scale neighborhoods, much to the chagrin of developers and builders. And Austin's mayor, sporting the championship name of Will Wynn, has been crucial in making downtown friendly to small businesses. So count on Austin's combination of liberal politics (the *Texas Monthly* columnist Gary Cartwright has called it "the blueberry in the tomato soup"), a creative citizenry, and a naturally contrarian Texas spirit to keep Austin if not completely weird, then at least a wonderfully eclectic place to live and to visit. ■



The interior of Iron Barbecue, a local