

Escape



ABOVE AND LEFT: THE GRAND ENTRANCE OF AND SCULPTURE GARDENS AT HOTEL ELLA. BELOW: A HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE AT THE INN AT DOS BRISAS.

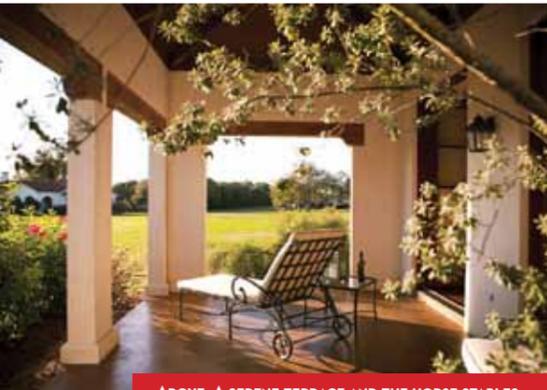
TEXAS REDUX

An unexpected renaissance is gripping pockets of the Lone Star State, rebranding Texas as a catalyst of cool **BY PAUL RUBIO**

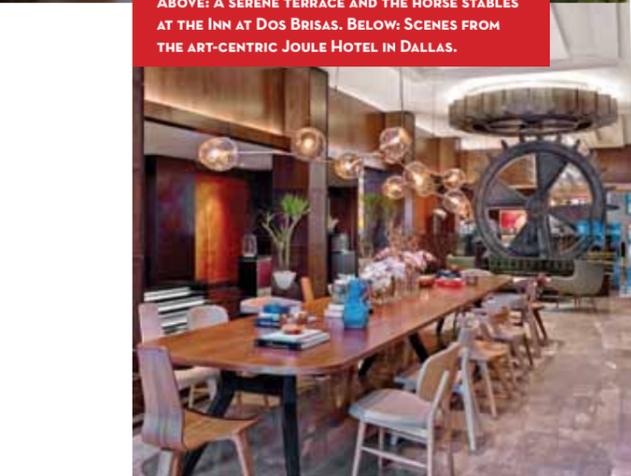
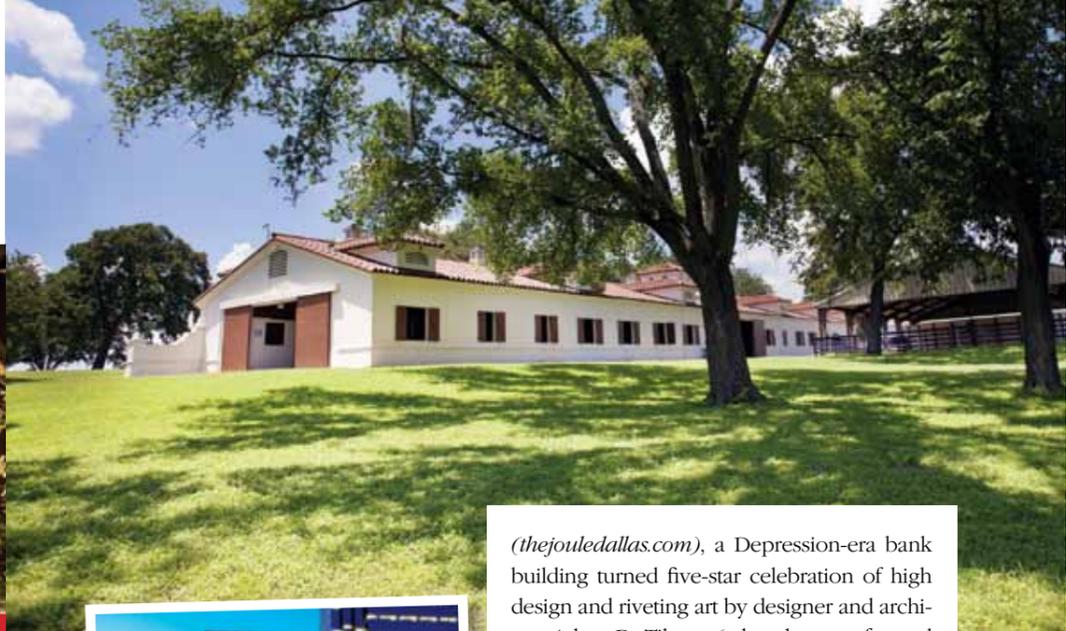
Deep in the heart of Austin, Hotel Ella (hotelella.com) marks the latest entry in the city's burgeoning hotel scene. Evolving from a cute college town to a metropolitan refuge for Texas eccentrics, the city embraces its slogan spirit of "Keep Austin Weird," and Hotel Ella is no different. An adaptive reuse of a Greek Revival mansion, the 47-room hotel keeps history in style. The former abode of Goodall H. Wooten—son of University of Texas founder Thomas Dudley Wooten—and his wife, Ella, juxtaposes tradition and minimalism, resulting in a space where original family portraits peer over edgy sculptures such as Barbara Segal's *Obsessive Compulsive*, a 2,000-pound marble Chanel handbag. Rife with modern works throughout, the hotel artfully blends with its trendy neighbors: the Contemporary Austin, the Blanton Museum of Art and the Mexic-Arte Museum.



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ABOVE: A SERENE TERRACE AND THE HORSE STABLES AT THE INN AT DOS BRISAS. BELOW: SCENES FROM THE ART-CENTRIC JOULE HOTEL IN DALLAS.



Two hours east of Austin, the intimate Inn at Dos Brisas (dosbrisas.com) comprises 313 acres of prime Texas Hill Country, including a new 42-acre organic farm that's placed the Inn at the forefront of the Texas farm-to-table movement; the in-house restaurant has even coined nomenclature for its bespoke cuisine: pitchfork to plate. Garden-centric menus utilize the 400-plus fruits and vegetables harvested on-

site, complemented by locally raised beef and seafood from the Gulf of Mexico, flown in fresh daily. Beyond exalted cuisine, the Inn at Dos Brisas is a sanctuary of escapism—a sprawling ranch of Relais & Châteaux pedigree shared among nine luxuriant units, each inspired by Spanish manor design and opening to a private world of outdoor enthusiasm. With horseback pursuits in the world-famous equestrian center as well as fishing, clay target shooting, cycling and hunting, the Inn at Dos Brisas is an unapologetic immersion into the Texas good life.

Farther north in Dallas, a citywide obsession with modern art is propelling the former oil industry megalopolis into jet-set stardom. Dallas brims with panache, as evident in the funky Bishop Arts District (home to more than 60 independent shops and galleries), the rising Design District and the world-renowned Nasher Sculpture Center and Dallas Museum of Art headlining the Art District. There's even a hotel dedicated to the arts: the Joule Hotel

(thejouledallas.com), a Depression-era bank building turned five-star celebration of high design and riveting art by designer and architect Adam D. Tihany (who also transformed The Breakers' Florentine Room into HMF). The Joule's wow factor is palpable, beginning with Tony Tasset's 30-foot *Eye* gazing at the hotel's façade and continuing to the lobby's art-in-motion cogged wheels and imagery of global subway scenes projected onto the walls. With art collections displayed across the hotel (including works by Andy Warhol and Tony Cragg), the haute design of the 164 guest rooms and eye-opening architectural elements like the cantilevered, rooftop swimming pool, the Joule ambushes the senses.

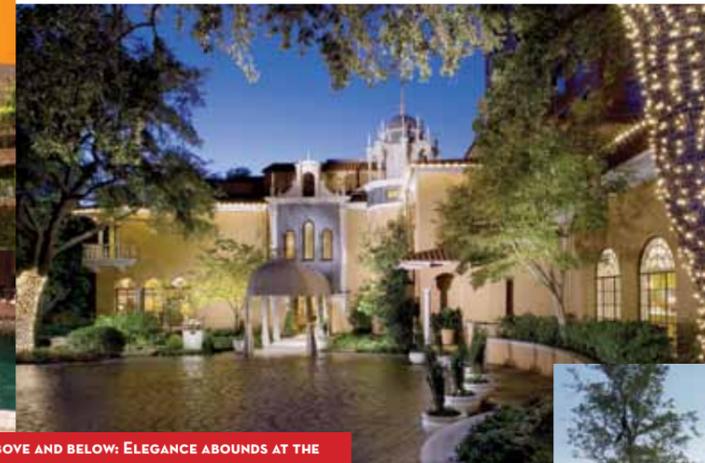
Art isn't the only thing defining Dallas these days. Texans also pride themselves on hospitality, history and social status, all of which converge at the Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek (rosewoodhotels.com). Tucked into the city's most prestigious neighborhood, Uptown Dallas, the 143-room hotel is built around a European-inspired mansion that has hosted the likes of Tennessee Williams and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Expect the Rosewood hallmarks of stellar service, elegantly appointed suites and high thread counts alongside experiences often reserved for A-listers, such as the live music sessions at the Mansion Bar and Chef Bruno Davailon's five-course menus at the Mansion Restaurant.

WINE TRAILS

In 1659, Texas became home to North America's first vineyard. Fast-forward 350 years, and the state is just now sobering up and capitalizing on its diverse topography and microclimates to emerge onto the New World wine scene. Earlier this year, *Wine Enthusiast* ranked Texas Hill Country the world's No. 3 Best Wine Travel Destination of 2014—a



ABOVE AND BELOW: ELEGANCE ABOUNDS AT THE HISTORIC ROSEWOOD MANSION ON TURTLE CREEK.



commercialized Napa Valley. Raise a glass at Delaney Vineyards and Winery, a replica of an eighteenth-century French chateau that offers tastings from its vineyards, including the 10 acres enveloping the estate.

If Grapevine whets your palate for Texas wines, consider a more in-depth trip through Hill Country, beginning west of Austin and continuing beyond Fredericksburg. Forty-two vineyards dot this picturesque region, and while the experience isn't quite as polished as California, the rewards and stories are always greater on the road less traveled.

coveted list shared with Mendoza, Argentina and Barossa Valley, Australia. Soon after, several Texas wineries—most notably McPherson Cellars in Lubbock and Becker Vineyards in Stonewall—took home multiple awards at national and international wine competitions.

Given the state's immense size and scattered vineyards (4,400 acres of grape country spread over eight American Viticulture Areas), developing a tourism infrastructure has posed challenges for Texas wine country. The solution: Foster a central location for showcasing Texas' liquid gold. Enter the charming 36 square-mile microcity of Grapevine (grapevinetexasusa.com), located near the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, that's now the tourist hub of the Texas wine industry.

Popular as day trips on the Dallas circuit, Grapevine's seven eclectic wineries create a memorable urban wine trail. At Homestead winery, oenophiles sip a dozen award-winning varietals from the fertile Red River Valley in a century-old home. Pair delectable farm-to-table cuisine with local favorites at Winewood Grill (thewinewood.com), where the ambience and gastronomy recall a pre-

FOODIE AND COCKTAIL CULTURE

Independent of Texas' mounting wine profile, sister cities Dallas and Austin have also embraced the global foodie and artisanal cocktail revolution. Think: the craft beer movement, the small-batch vodka movement, chef-driven restaurants, ethnic eateries and experimental flavor combinations that border on genius.

At Sway (swayaustin.com) in Austin, named a Top 50 Restaurant by *Bon Appetit* magazine, journey to remote reaches of Thailand in a seductive, contemporary setting and delight in incredible prawn *miange* (prawn, toasted coconut and grapefruit wrapped in betel leaf), *som tam* (green papaya salad) and salt-and-pepper calamari. At American brasserie CBD Provisions (cbdprovisions.com) in downtown Dallas, experience mixology at its finest with daring options like the mescal-heavy Dill Maguey or more conservative choices like Sloe Park Swizzle, a Texas take on the mojito using gin and lemon. Afterwards, feast on sublime Southern dishes such as black-eyed pea hummus, family-style whole day catch in sausage-and-okra gumbo, and pan-roasted quail.

At Pakpao (pakpaothai.com), a petite Dal-



ABOVE: THE DELANEY VINEYARDS AND WINEWOOD GRILL IN GRAPEVINE. BELOW: THAI FOODIE FANTASIA AT SWAY IN AUSTIN AND PAKPAO IN DALLAS.



las eatery run by Food Network celebrity chef Jet Tila, indulge in the weekend Thai Bloody Mary brunch with a DIY bar that features multiple handcrafted mixes and dozens of toppings and garnishes, perfect for washing down hefty plates of *goong obh woon seng* (steamed prawns with mung bean noodles) and authentic pad thai.

Similar to the surprising art, wine and hotel scenes of Texas, the increasing foodie culture signals the opening of a brave new world of Texas urban and country cool. ◀