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JOURNAL CONCIERGE

# Insider's Guide to Austin

*Where to eat, sleep, shop and play in the quirky tech hub (and capital) of Texas*

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Rainey Street Leah Overstreet for The Wall Street Journal

**THERE MAY BE** no more magnetic town in America today than the Texas capital. Austin anchors the fastest-growing metro area in the country, with a population that expanded by more than 2% in 2013. It's a perennial on "best city" lists, lauded for its job prospects and its friendliness to small business, its music and its barbecue and its breakfast tacos. It has also become a place of pilgrimage, especially during South by Southwest, the film, music and technology festival that swamps the town for three weeks each March.

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A crossroads from its earliest days, Austin has a rich, layered culture that reflects its frontier spirit. The town celebrates weirdness—don't be surprised if your taxi driver tells you he is fluent in dog—and embraces outsiders. It has fostered talents as diverse as [Michael Dell](#), who dropped out of the University of Texas before founding his eponymous PC company; novelist J.M. Coetzee, who got a Ph.D. at UT; and Willie



### Photos: What to Do in Austin, Texas



Click to view slideshow *Leah Overstreet for The Wall Street Journal*

Nelson, who found new musical life here in the 1970s after "retiring."

The city's architecture reflects Austin's character—history and innovation, past and present, side by side. Once, the dome of the 1888 Renaissance revival-style Capitol dominated the skyline. Now it seems almost overshadowed by the forest of new office and apartment buildings. New food trucks sit steps from restored Tudor revival homes and Craftsman-style bungalows from the 1920s and 1930s. A few blocks from Sixth Street's bars and clubs, you'll find the Bremond Block Historic District, with some of Austin's oldest dwellings—gracious 19th-century Victorians. From the city center, suburban subdivisions from subsequent decades spread outward, like tree rings marking eras of growth.

Worrying about the loss of oddness seems like its residents' unofficial pastime. But change has always been an Austin constant, and you don't have to be there long to find evidence that an idiosyncratic spirit endures.

—Jeff Chu

### *The Chef: Paul Qui*

*'Top Chef' winner, chef/owner of Qui, which opened in 2013*



Paul Qui

**Late-Night Snack** // Las Trancas. A taco trailer that's still open after I get off work. It's the perfect low-key spot to grab some tacos, quesadillas and tortas. They also serve grilled whole chickens on the weekends; the key is to go around noon, when they are fresh off the grill. *1210 E. Cesar Chavez St.*

**Meat Market** // Salt and Time. The best butcher's shop, with the freshest meat in town. They always create new cuts for us to play with—flanken rib, heavy chops (this includes the pork belly with the chop), beef oysters. They also have beer and cold-brew Cuvée coffee—local roasters—on tap. *1912 E.*

*Seventh St., [saltandtime.com](http://saltandtime.com)*

**Winning Dinner** // Justine's. The best place to eat, drink, party and afterparty—just a really fun place to have a drink or a late dinner. It's a French brasserie with an amazing patio and a really intimate dining area. The music is played off records. I like ordering anything off the daily board. *4710 E. Fifth St., [justines1937.com](http://justines1937.com)*

**Men's Shop** // Service Menswear. I love that they pre-wash and dry all the clothes. They have Gitman Vintage and Naked and Famous oxfords, which I'm a big fan of. *1400 S. Congress Ave. #A160, [servicemenswear.com](http://servicemenswear.com)*

**Boot Boutique** // HELM Boots. I'm a boot freak, and this is a great company from Austin that makes them. I own about seven pairs of Helm boots. *900 E. Sixth St., Suite 101, [helmboots.com](http://helmboots.com)*



Sanya Richards-Ross

### *The Runner: Sanya Richards-Ross*

*Four-time Olympic gold-medalist, University of Texas at Austin alum, Austinite*

**Brunch Spot** // Four Seasons Hotel Austin. They have a five-star brunch with great fresh seafood selections, made-to-order omelets and nice mimosas. It's where my husband, [Aaron] Ross, and I got married. 98 San Jacinto Blvd., [fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com)

**Sips and Sides** // Max's Wine Dive. I don't drink much, but this is one place I've been that's awesome. They have a variety of wines and really yummy appetizers. 207 San Jacinto Blvd., [maxswinedive.com](http://maxswinedive.com)

**Lyrical Evening** // The Elephant Room. Ross and I love poetry nights in Austin. The Elephant Room has fun live shows, including jazz and poetry. 315 Congress Ave., [elephantroom.com](http://elephantroom.com)

**Pool with a View** // W Austin. It has a rooftop pool where you can rent a chic cabana for a couple of hours or the whole day, and just enjoy friends and the great service. 200 Lavaca St., [whotelaustin.com](http://whotelaustin.com)

**Floral Adventure** // Zilker Botanical Garden. Town Lake has a beautiful botanical garden with flowers from all over the world. It's amazing—a very relaxing experience. Go for a walk or a jog, or perch on a bench to just enjoy nature. 2220 Barton Springs Rd., [zilker garden.org](http://zilker garden.org)

**Classic Hotel** // The Driskill. Located on Austin's famous Sixth Street, it's very elegant, with great dining and fun amenities. 604 Brazos St., [driskill.hyatt.com](http://driskill.hyatt.com)

### *The CEO: Blake Mycoskie*

*Founder and CEO of TOMS Shoes, part-time Austin resident*



Blake Mycoskie

**Sweet Swim** // Barton Springs. The crystal-clear water here feels magical—some people believe it is a fountain of youth of sorts. I think the best time to go is early morning on a hot summer day, when the temperature difference between the air and the water creates a mystical fog. 2201 Barton Springs Rd.

**CHIC Shop** // Stag. The vibe here is hipster, confident, cool. They have everything from obscure magazines and books to swim trunks. The last thing I bought there was a Billykirk bag. 1423 S. Congress Ave., [stagaustin.com](http://stagaustin.com)

**BBQ Spot** // Franklin Barbecue. I usually order a full rack of ribs. The rubs they put on it are super-tasty, and the meat just falls off the bone. You have to get there early—they sell out by lunchtime. I think anytime you have to wait in line at 10 a.m. for barbecue, the anticipation helps make the taste better too! 900 E. 11th St., [franklinbarbecue.com](http://franklinbarbecue.com)

**Healthy Tip** // The Daily Juice. People from all walks of life go here—you've got health nuts coming from Pilates classes and business guys trying to keep the pounds off. It's super-fresh ingredients and unique

recipes in a great location. 205 W. Third St. and 3300 Bee Caves Rd. #245, [dailyjuicecafe.com](http://dailyjuicecafe.com)

**Music Venue** // Austin City Limits Live. My favorite live-music venue in town. I think the sound and acoustics are the best I have ever heard. I saw Jack Ingram there, which was really special. 310 W. Willie Nelson Blvd., [austincitylimits.com](http://austincitylimits.com)

### *The Performer: BettySoo*

*Austin-based indie-folk singer and songwriter*



BettySoo

**Java and JAZZ** // Strange Brew. It's half coffee-and-sandwich shop, half really beautiful listening room. There are great local brews on tap, and they really care about musicians and the music community. It's everything from solo singer-songwriters to rockin' gospel bands to jazz and funk and blues. 5326 Manchaca Rd., [strangebrewaustin.com](http://strangebrewaustin.com)

**Mexican Meal** // La Cocina de Consuelo. Consuelo and her family cook all this fresh, beautiful food and serve it to you lovingly. It's inexpensive too! They have this amazing breakfast taco, which sounds generic but is not: roasted pepper and cactus, cotija cheese and avocado, served on a handmade tortilla. 4516 Burnet Rd., [consueloskitchen.com](http://consueloskitchen.com)

**Movie House** // Alamo Drafthouse Cinema. They bring you food during the previews, and you can order beer and wine during the movie. You can see new releases, but they also do late-night singalongs and quote-alongs. We went to a "Napoleon Dynamite" quote-along at midnight, and people were shouting along to the entire movie. 320 E. Sixth St., [drafthouse.com](http://drafthouse.com)

**Funky Furnishings** // Cool Stuff and Furniture. It's a terrible name, and it has one of those terrible banners outside with bad script. But you'll find funky Mexican imports and a giant teak table and Blues Brothers cutouts. It's the weirdest combination of new and used stuff. I want to buy a couple of metal dinosaurs so my neighbors will be like, "What?!" 8231 Burnet Rd., 832-969-4719

### *Plus Don't Miss...*

**Rainey Street** This charming, tree-lined street of rehabbed 80-year-plus homes was rezoned about a decade ago and is now where you can find some of Austin's finest restaurants and bars. [raineystbars.com](http://raineystbars.com)

**El Primo** | Asking people in Austin to pick their favorite breakfast taco is like asking about religion—dangerous and divisive—but the morning tacos and tortas from this trailer on South First Street are delectable. (512) 299-2489



Austin, Texas

**Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin** | Among the treasures in UT's rare-book collection are a complete Gutenberg Bible, a rare first edition of Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," and some of the archives of John Steinbeck and Evelyn Waugh. [hrc.utexas.edu](http://hrc.utexas.edu)

**Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library & Museum** | Housed in a landmarked Gordon Bunshaft

building on the UT campus, the LBJ Library chronicles the life and memorable work of the 36th president.

[lbjlibrary.org](http://lbjlibrary.org)

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