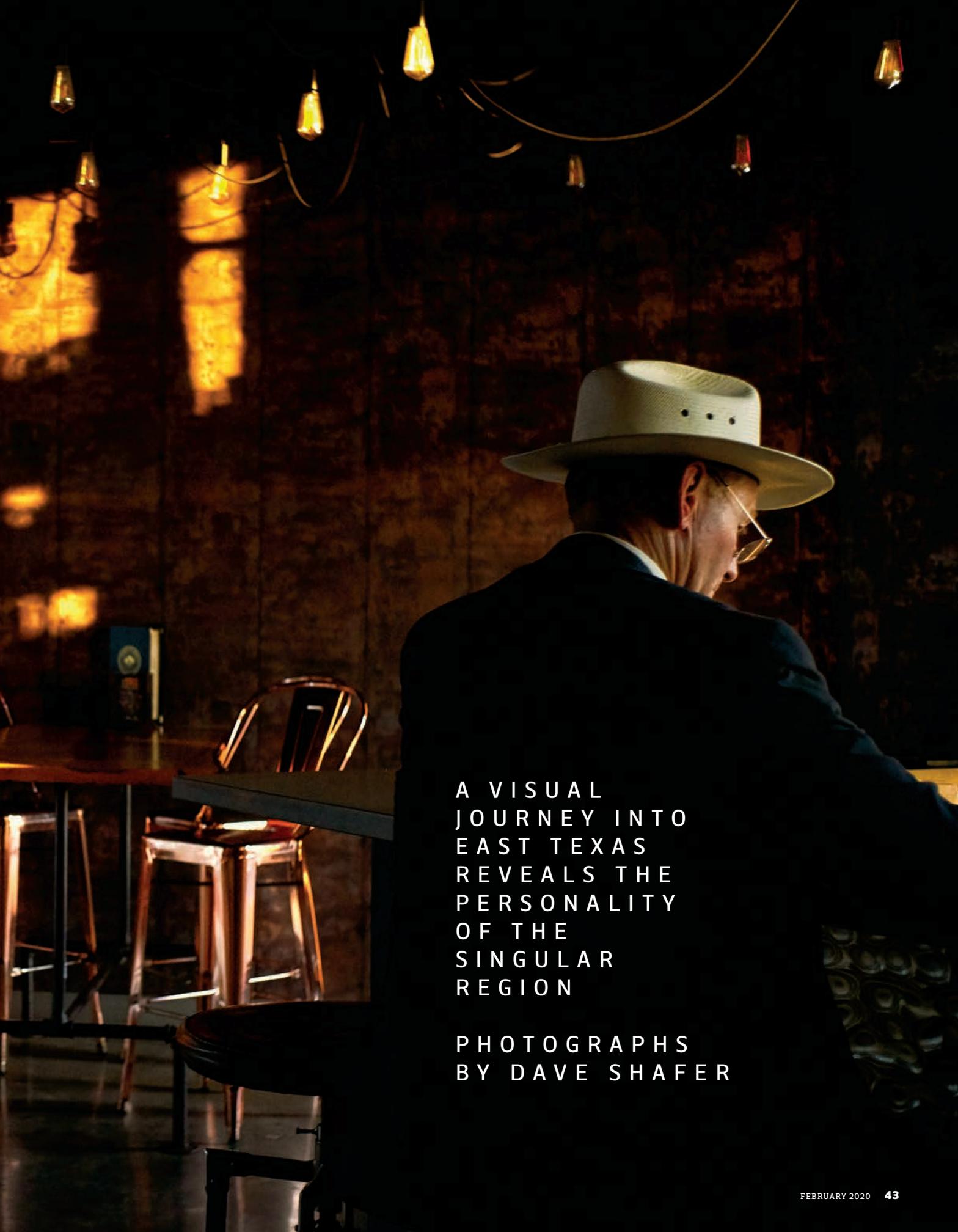


PEEKING
THROUGH
THE
PINES



A VISUAL
JOURNEY INTO
EAST TEXAS
REVEALS THE
PERSONALITY
OF THE
SINGULAR
REGION

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY DAVE SHAFER



certain mystery shrouds East Texas. With no major metroplexes and few flashy attractions, it's often overlooked by those traveling through the state. But if photographer Dave Shafer learned one thing from exploring the region during the past year, it's that East Texans like it that way. "I'm not sure I want to show you how good this place is," a woman in Palestine told him.

Over the years, Dallas-based Shafer has photographed East Texas subjects for many publications, including *Texas Highways*. But this was his first opportunity to wander freely and soak in the sights, traditions, and flavors that define the Piney Woods—a chance to slowly uncover what others ignore or overlook.

"I've been there enough to know it's different than everywhere else in Texas," Shafer says. "It feels a little slower, like the volume's turned down a bit. I know I'm going someplace special that has its own drum beat."

He started off with beloved staples: the Texas State Railroad that runs between Palestine and Rusk, Caddo Lake, and the Tomato Festival in Jacksonville. Meandering down countless backroads led Shafer to more unknown locales—he visited 22 towns in total—like Malakoff, Timpson, and Corrigan. "I wanted to give myself plenty of room for serendipity and conversations," he says.

And despite the tongue-in-cheek response from the woman in Palestine, people were mostly happy to talk. Shafer says he discovered a lot through the simple question, "What's East Texas for you?"

The photographs featured here—a small selection of the 11,000 Shafer took—aim to share some of those answers. "There's a lot more here than what people know," Shafer says.

But we'll keep that between us.

—Kimya Kavehkar



OPENING SPREAD: A businessman enjoys a handcrafted cocktail and newspaper at Nine Flags Bar & Grill in Nacogdoches' Fredonia Hotel. "It may be one of the oldest towns in Texas, which many historic buildings pay tribute to, but the downtown area feels very much in the present," Shafer says.

PALESTINE (TOP AND RIGHT): Nuns climb the steps of Sacred Heart Catholic Church—built in 1893—for Wednesday evening mass. "I got to spend the day with this 101-year-old survivor of the industrial age," Shafer says of this Texas State Railroad train. "I rode in the cab with the engineer and firefighter. The engine makes a great noise as it rumbles and rattles down the tracks."

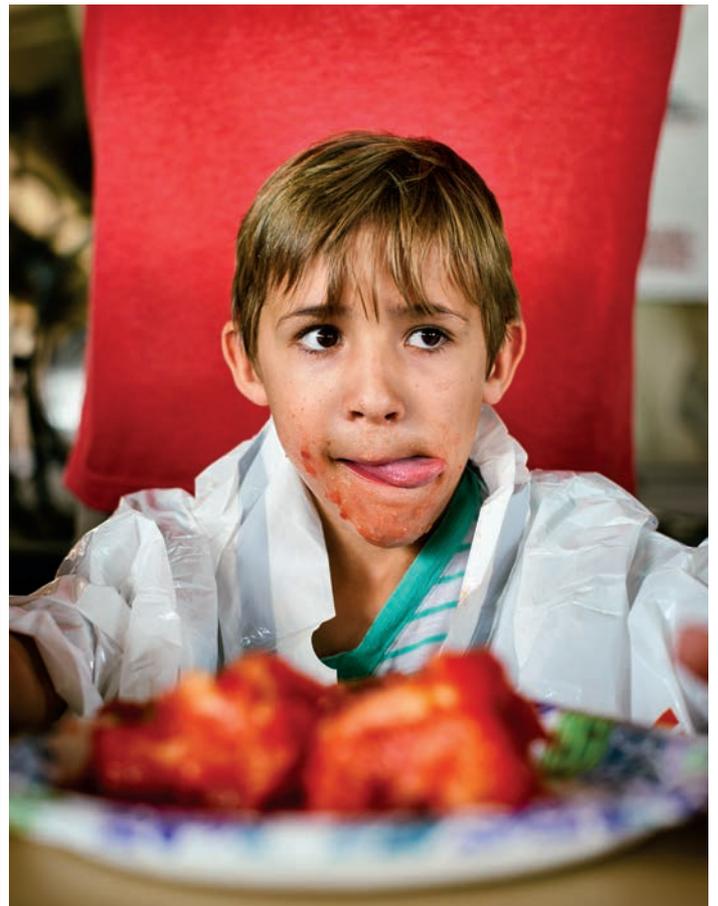






KILGORE (FAR LEFT AND TOP): Karsen Conser is captain of the Kilgore College drill team, the Rangerettes. "I had the privilege of spending a Saturday in October with these impressive ladies," Shafer says. "The talent, pride, and discipline on display will give you goosebumps."

JACKSONVILLE (BOTTOM, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): A Jacksonville High School tuba player readies himself before the marching band's half-time performance. Todd Dillon attends Tomato Fest in June. "Jacksonville supplies Texas' tomatoes," Shafer explains. "The town celebrates this with a car show, mascots, and, of course, a tomato-eating contest." At the 100-year-old Texas Basket Factory, an employee organizes the baskets as they enter the drying ovens.





NACOGDOCHES (TOP): In the old schoolhouse at Millard's Crossing—a reconstructed historic village—a copy of *Sanders Third Reader*, an early American textbook, rests on an ink-stained desk.

HUNTSVILLE (BOTTOM): Although Church's BBQ (an extension of the New Zion Missionary Baptist Church) closed its doors in November, it fed the community for 53 years. Cynthia Archie (pictured) kept true to the recipes of Annie Mae Ward, the church member who started the barbecue restaurant.





MALAKOFF (TOP): Cooper Busch owns Dry Creek Taxidermy. "His business that he runs with his son is not only the place to bring your prized trophy deer, but also where the local retired men gather to discuss the important issues of the day," Shafer relates.

TIMPSON (BOTTOM): Judy Samford is a member of the group RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program). The skillful quilters make and sell works to benefit organizations like the Timpson Volunteer Fire Department and the food bank.





CENTER (TOP AND BOTTOM):

Workers at Wiggins Farm pick and throw watermelons—one of Texas' largest agricultural products. Rio Theatre owner Mike Adkison changes the letters on the marquee. The moviehouse proclaims to have been “bringing Hollywood to Shelby County since 1926.”

CANTON (RIGHT): “Spending time at First Monday Trade Days can really bend your perception of time and space as you walk the many rows of vendors,” Shafer observes. “All the people seemed to blend together—then in the distance strode Denis from Bremond with his chicken, Sally, to see what was good.”







SULPHUR SPRINGS (TOP): Chris Wiesinger finds and saves heirloom red spider lily bulbs, or *lycoris radiata*, and propagates them on his farm. “He has always loved to find old homesteads and gain access from the families to dig and save these East Texas icons,” Shafer says.

HIGHWAY 19 (BOTTOM): Somewhere on State Highway 19 a sign lets you know Texas okra is available at a nearby vegetable stand.





COMO (TOP): "This old Chevrolet is tougher than the barn that has provided it shelter for decades," Shafer says.

ATHENS (BOTTOM): Free Fishing Day at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in June brought out many grandfathers and grandsons, all vying to win various contests. "This youngster, on his way home, enjoyed seeing the fish in their environment at one of the display tanks," Shafer shares.







CROCKETT (FAR LEFT): Porter Hendrix, a fourth-generation fiddler, competes at the World Championship Fiddlers' Festival for the first time. "Young and old make the trip to Crockett to perform and try to win a trophy and bragging rights," Shafer explains. "But it's really just a great excuse to see old friends, meet new ones, and jam endlessly."

CORRIGAN (TOP): One of the Alto Yellow-jackets ices his ankle during their 3A match-up with the Corrigan-Camden Bulldogs.

TYLER (BOTTOM): April Pledger and her miniature Hereford calm each other before stepping into the show ring at the East Texas State Fair. "Seeing the dedication and care these families give their kids and the show animals, and the respect and responsibility these kids take on, is impressive," Shafer says.



UNCERTAIN (TOP AND FAR RIGHT):

“On this 22-degree morning in November, fog was coming off the water, and a fisherman was off to catch his limit of crappie on Caddo Lake,” Shafer says. Bobo watches over the minnow tanks and life preservers at Johnson’s Ranch Marina. Established in 1908, it is the oldest inland marina in Texas.

NAPLES (BOTTOM): “The smell of animals, earth, and leather on a steamy July evening in Naples lets you know that the Watermelon Festival & Rodeo is here,” Shafer says. “This rural community puts on one of the best rodeos you’ll see with good kids, tough cowboys, and the Queens of the Rodeo.” 🤠



