

TEXAS

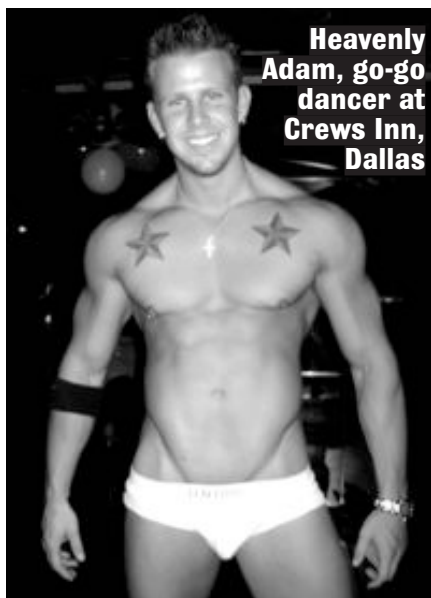
Is everything really bigger in Texas? The size and vitality of the state's various gay communities seem to confirm that Texans do indeed like to do things in a big way. Tag along as we report on San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, and Austin.



Go-go Sergio of EJ's, Houston



Hubba
hubba,
Scott from
Oilcan
Harry's,
Austin



Heavenly
Adam, go-go
dancer at
Crews Inn,
Dallas

Eddie Sanchez

I'll admit it, Texas surprised me. Neither a time-warped version of the *Dallas* TV series or a *tableau vivant* of *Brokeback Mountain*, Texas is a vibrant and diverse state. Gay Texans are a proud lot and also some of the friendliest people I've ever met, eager to show off their big cities and immense countryside.

SAN ANTONIO

With its boat taxis and scenic downtown "RiverWalk" promenades, San Antonio is a perfect spot for romance. Add to that the breathtaking San Antonio Botanical Gardens (which is hosting its Concert Under the Stars series through August), the Natural Bridge Caverns, the yearly Fiesta (a city-wide week-long event with songs and dances from Mexico, Spain, Argentina, and Texas)—and you might not ever want to leave this magical city. And while it may seem to the uninitiated like a sedate scene, trust me, these people know how to party!

Proof positive can be found at **The Xing**—that is, "The Crossing"—(1818 North Main). I was there for their grand opening, and it was a total blast with male dancers, Las Vegas showgirls, and performers channeling everyone from Wayne Newton to Sonny and Cher... and Cher... and Cher. They also had a cell where the

cutest security guard I've ever seen would lock up anyone of your choice for ten minutes. (I, personally, can think of quite a few people I'd like to have under lock and key.) Four separate bars and three different themed dance floors (Tejano, Country, and Video) will keep you moving all night long. Add to that friendly bartenders and their daily drink specials, and you'll make *The Xing* the first place you hit in San Antonio. Oh, and did I happen to mention their Wet Boxers contest on Wednesday?

Temperatures rise at **Heat** (1500 North Main). Full of futuristic video/media panels complementing the great music and still allowing for intimate conversation, Heat's open daily 4pm through 2am on Mondays and Tuesday, and after-hours Wednesdays through Sundays. There's a heated outdoor patio (note the cookouts on Sundays), and a well-trod dance floor with hot go-go dancers on weekends. Wednesdays are a big guzzling night, with discounted well drinks. Modern and upscale, this is a hot and happening place.

Nearby, **The Saint** (1430 North Main) shines. Female impersonators account for a lot of the devilish revelry here, and drag shows and various local Divas are an ongoing spectacle. **The Annex** (330 San Pedro Avenue) is a cruise bar where you might find the local dream boy you've been looking for.

Continued on page 50

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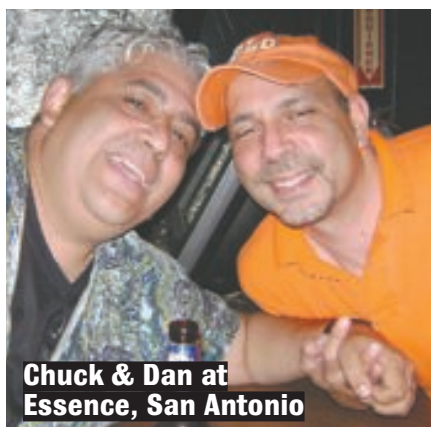
**Trey, Shaun, Colby, & Erasmo
at The Saint, San Antonio**



**Dreamy Kip at Pegasus,
San Antonio**



**Bartender Robert at
The Xing, San Antonio**



**Chuck & Dan at
Essence, San Antonio**



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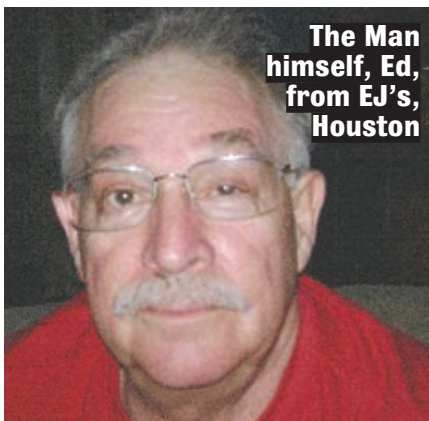
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Marvelous Ed, owner of EJ's, with Sean the Stripper, Houston



The Man himself, Ed, from EJ's, Houston



Bartender Jeremy (dimples!) at Guava Lamp, Houston



Continued from page 47

There's nary a cover at **Silver Dollar** (1418 North Main), a country-western bar with a large patio. Daily drink specials and gyrating strippers draw gay men of all leanings.

Pegasus (1402 North Main), a cruise bar, gets going after 9pm.

Partying in the downtown River Walk area is at **Bonham Exchange** (411 Bonham), locally alluded to as "bottom exchange." This large, multi-leveled club is well trafficked for their happy hour on Fridays.

Centrally located, the **2015 Place** (2015 San Pedro) is a neighborhood bar with a daily happy hour from 4-8pm.

Dining

Located minutes from downtown in the quaint King William Historic District is a great gay-owned restaurant and cafe called **Mad Hatter's** (320 Beauregard). Besides tea, there's a wealth of breakfast, lunch, and dinner offerings for every budget. Sunday "Champagne Brunch" is one of their specialties, and is usually packed with a funky mix, welcomed by owner Rene. There are several relaxing dining and sitting areas here. With the attractive art, friendly people, and the delicious fare, you may want to linger for most of the afternoon!

Candle Light (3011 North St. Mary's), on the opposite side of downtown from King William, is a gay-friendly up-market yet laid-back coffeehouse serving casual fare and popular appetizers at reasonable prices, along with gourmet desserts, coffees, and teas. The shady outdoor patio here is heaven, especially during the hot summer months.

Shopping

The gay-owned and operated **Encore Video** (1031 NE Loop 410) is a videosmith that also offers daily and weekly rentals of camcorders and VCRs. Their other establishment, **Zebraz.com** (1608 North Main Avenue), carries a large assortment of gay-oriented merchandise. Goodies range from funky club wear to CDs, flavored lubes, and everything in between.

Lodgings

The Painted Lady Guesthouse (620

Broadway; 210-220-1092) is one of the best-run bed-and-breakfasts in the US—even the *New York Times* is impressed. It's close to the Alamo, and offers impeccable, luxurious suites replete with amenities. At this truly sybaritic retreat, complimentary breakfast is delivered to one's room. There's a rooftop spa, videos to rent, and the affable innkeepers are a wealth of information. Plus there's free off-street parking.

The historic **Arbor House** (109 Arciniega; Arborhouse.com) consists of five stately houses linked by a lush garden courtyard, just one-and-a-half blocks to River Walk. Both the owner and management are native South Texans and have developed Arbor House to reflect the independent spirit of their native land. Suites are named after Alamo heroes, geographically appropriate given that the real Alamo is just down the street.

Steamy diversions

Alternative Club Inc., known as **ACI** (827 East Elmira), is an interesting alternative to a bath house that is worth checking out.

HOUSTON

Hipper by far than I ever could have imagined, Houston has some of the coolest people and friendliest bars around (some of which open as early as 7am—hey, it was research!). It's virtually impossible for a stranger not to get into a conversation here. Houston has somehow retained a small town feel even though it's a city with a world-class theater (The Alley), a jaw-dropping skyline, and some of the best restaurants you'll ever treat yourself to.

Houston's gay community is located largely in the Montrose area, but there are plenty of other places to see and be seen at. A word to the wise here: if you're driving, obey those speed limits. The police don't play around. Just set it on cruise control (the car, not yourself), and you'll be fine.

The city frolics year-round but immediately after Mardi Gras, Let Us Entertain You, a.k.a. "Luey Weekend," adds a new dimension. It's as if the Mardi Gras party from New Orleans moved to Houston—one week later; more info at Lueyweekend.com. Also adding to the mix is Jungle,

Continued on page 54



**Alexis Paris and Virginia Slymm,
EJ's Houston**



**Frosty, Brian, & Drew
of In & Out,
Houston**



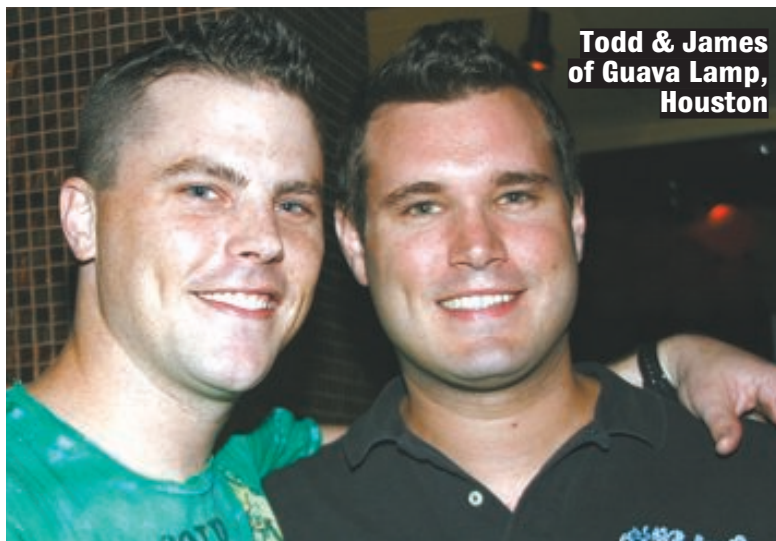
**Ultra-cute Adrian,
EJ's Houston**



**Beer god
Peter of
JR's,
Houston**



**Owner George and his better half, Mac,
at George, Houston**



**Todd & James
of Guava Lamp,
Houston**



**Bartender Brian at
In & Out, Houston**

HOUSTON

CLUBS & EATERIES

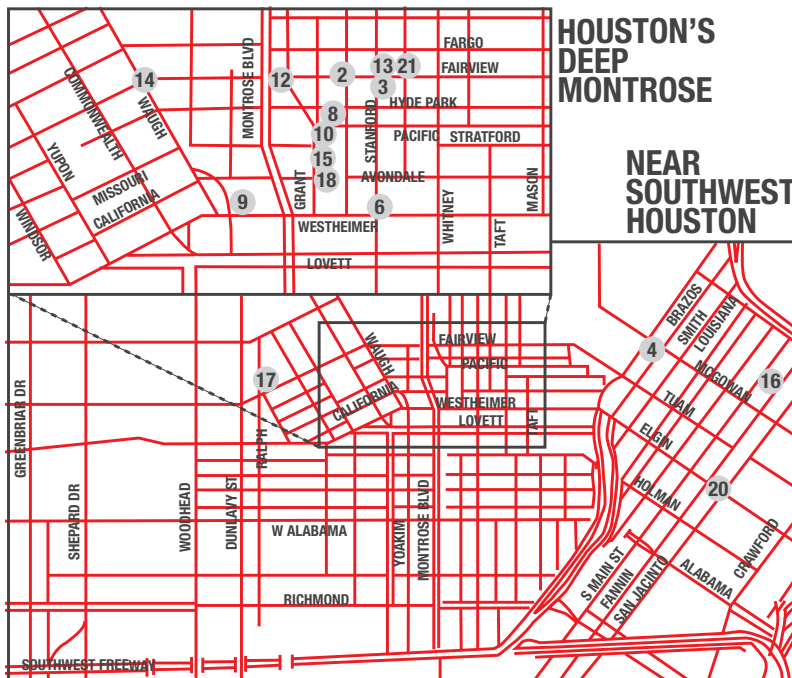
- 18) **Baba Yega**
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2607 Grant
- 4) **Brazos River Bottom**
(713) 528-9192
2400 Brazos
- 17) **EJ's**
(713) 527-9071
2517 Ralph
- 3) **George**
(713) 528-8102
617 Fairview
- 14) **Guava Lamp**
(713) 524-3359
570 Waugh
- 8) **JR's**
(713) 521-2519
808 Pacific
- 9) **Mary's**
(713) 527-9669
1022 Westheimer
- 13) **Meteor**
(713) 521-0123
2306 Genesee
- 10) **Montrose Mining Co.**
(713) 529-7488
805 Pacific
- 13) **Ripcord**
(713) 521-2792
715 Fairview
- 15) **South Beach**
(713) 529-7623
810 Pacific Avenue

*) **Tony's Corner Pocket**
(713) 571-7870
817 West Dallas

OTHER

- 21) **Black Hawk Leather**
(713) 532-8437
711 Fairview
- 16) **Club Houston**
(713) 659-4998
2205 Fannin
- 12) **Hollywood Books and Cafe**
(713) 523-8855
2409 Grant
- 2) **Hollywood Super Center**
(713) 527-8510
807 Fairview
- 6) **Leather Forever**
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604 Westheimer
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Continued from page 50

a spring circuit party, where all the best DJs offer up their wares.

Nightlife

Guava Lamp (570 Waugh) is Houston's premier video bar and lounge, where the young and hip crowd flock. It offers a martini lounge atmosphere, plenty of conversation-friendly spots, and a smiling and gorgeous bar staff that will make you giggle like a schoolgirl. (Not my proudest moment.) With no cover, free parking, and an easy-to-get-to location, what's not to love? And whatever you do, do not miss their Karaoke Wednesday, with some real, honest-to-God good singers.

There's nothing fancy about **EJ's** (2517 Ralph Street, at Westheimer), but after just one visit and you'll know why it's been a local favorite for years. Four bars, a huge outdoor patio, pool tables, and a dance floor that can get downright frisky make it worth a visit. Make sure to stop by on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights for their amateur strip contests. Child, my nerves.

With brightly colored walls (paging Sr. Almodovar!) and a shoe chandelier that has to be seen to be believed, **Tony's Corner Pocket** (817 West Dallas) is your oasis in Houston's downtown area. With a patio bar that offers a gorgeous view of the downtown area, Tony's Corner Pocket features one of Houston's best happy hours. Go-go boys abound on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays.

You want friendly? **George** (617 Fairview) is it. Billed as "your country sports bar," George is a bar where attitude is most definitely checked at the door. Boasting pool tables, drink specials, and a host who is a sitcom waiting to happen, George is one of those places where you automatically feel at home.

Ripcord (715 Fairview) is one of Texas's most well known Levi/leather/uniform clubs, packed with a friendly and cruisy crowd that lingers after-hours on weekends. The bar has been a Montrose institution for years, offers great drink specials, and is host to many leather events throughout the year.

South Beach (810 Pacific) is, quite simply, divine. This 10,000-square-foot dance club will take your breath away.

Glamorous and dazzling, South Beach is a favorite of the locals who flock to it after midnight, Wednesday through Sunday. Other bars under the same umbrella include the wonderful and expansive **JR's Bar and Grill** (808 Pacific) and **Santa Fe Bar and Patio** (808 Pacific). These party bars tout the latest in videos, music, karaoke, and comely strippers.

Montrose Mining Company (805 Pacific), across the street, is for cowboys, leather-men, and their friends.

Mary's (1022 Westheimer) is an old standby and retains a cozy watering-hole feel. An outside bar includes a large, festive patio.

Brazos River Bottom (2400 Brazos) is home to Houston's cowboys and country-western dancing. Drink specials every day contribute to its ongoing success for over 28 years.

Eating

Hollywood Bistro (2409 Grant Street) used to be Hollywood Cafe, a bookstore-cum-eatery, and has only recently been split because of the greatly increased size of the bookstore. The literary portion has moved a block away and has been renamed Hollywood Super Center (see "Shopping," below). Hollywood Bistro will feature fresh pastries and a late-night breakfast, perfect after a night on the town.

Hollywood Vietnamese Restaurant (2409-D Grant Street) is just next door to the Hollywood Bistro. The mammoth selection of food here includes Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine (with a few American favorites such as the "Hollywood Steak"). Attractive Asian art and unique furnishings and plants add to the ambience.

Mockingbird Restaurant (1985 Welch Street) offers a romantic setting with inventive and delicious gourmet cooking from an award-winning chef.

Shopping

Hollywood Super Center (807 Fairview), located across the street from the bistro and Vietnamese restaurant of the same name, is truly a gay superstore. There's an unsurpassed selection of gifts, cards, books, posters, gay-themed movies, T-shirts, erotica, adult DVDs (for sale and rent), and much more. Keep an eye out for

the new services coming soon to their remodeled second floor.

Getting physical

Like its family of Midtown locations nationwide, offering fun and safe places for guys to meet socially, **Midtowne Spa** (3100 Fannin Street) has ample rooms and lockers for your cruising pleasure. An outdoor patio offers a breather from the steam room, which is modeled after a dark cave with numerous caverns to explore. After using their dry sauna, jump into their large indoor pool. A workout facility is on premises as well. A private party room is also available for special group functions.

Club Houston (2205 Fannin Street) is a sterling facility with a gym that comprises tons of free weights, machines, as well as a personal trainer on-premises.

Lodgings

Modern B&B (4003 Hazard Street; 800-462-4014, 832-279-6367; Modernbb.com) is brand new and utterly fabulous. Your hosts Lisa and Rodney are charm personified, and the four-level place is clean, crisp, and inviting. A delicious and healthy breakfast is included with your stay. This gay-friendly bed-and-breakfast boasts tastefully decorated rooms, artists' works on walls, exercise equipment, and shaded verandahs that present panoramic views above the tree-line. Call them for up-to-the-minute rates or visit their website.

Lovett Inn (501 Lovett; 800-779-5224) is a beautifully restored mansion located close to many of the gay attractions. This Houston bed-and-breakfast has been a local favorite since 1989. The Lovett Inn is located on a tree-lined boulevard in the Montrose Museum District and near downtown. You can take a leisurely walk through the neighborhood, enjoy a swim in the pool, unwind in the hot tub, or relax with a good book in the library.

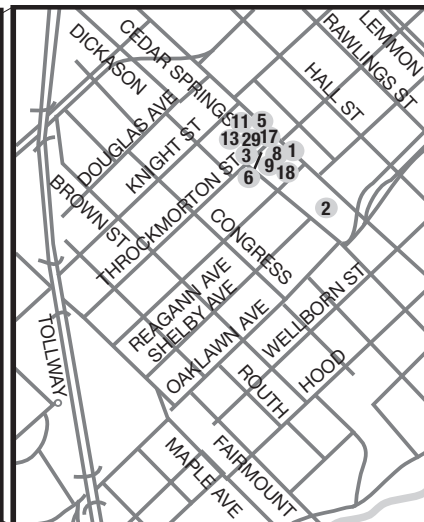
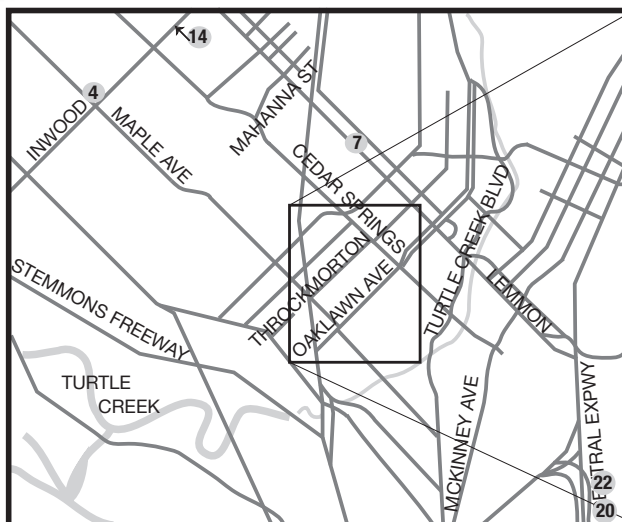
DALLAS

The US's ninth-largest city, Dallas is cosmopolitan and beautiful, with world-class architecture, a booming arts district (soon to be the country's largest!), and, like all of gay Texas, a sense of duty when it comes to giving back to their community. What truly amazed me is how inclu-

DALLAS

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- 4) Eagle Dallas**
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2515 Inwood
- 7) Hidden Door**
(214) 526-0620
5025 Bowser
- 5) Hunky's**
(214) 522-1212
4000 Cedar Springs Rd
- 6) JR's Bar and Grill**
(214) 559-0650
3923 Cedar Springs
- 2) Mickey's**
(214) 219-6425
3851 Cedar Springs
- 1) Round Up Saloon**
(214) 522-9611
3912 Cedar Springs
- 8) S4**
(214) 559-0650
3911 Cedar Springs
- 9) Sue Ellen's**
(214) 559-0650
3903 Cedar Springs
- 3) Throckmorton Mining Company**
(214) 559-0650
3014 Throckmorton
- 11) Woody's Sports Bar and Lounge**
(214) 520-6629
4011 Cedar Springs



RETAIL

- 17) Crossroads Market**
(214) 521-8919
3930 Cedar Springs Rd
- 29) Obscurities**
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sive gays are in Dallas. Sure, there are gay bars and lesbian bars and Hispanic bars, but people feel free and comfortable going from one to the next. Dallas's gay life is concentrated mainly in the Oak Lawn area with bars and clubs catering to varied gay tastes, along with stores and restaurants.

Bars and clubs

Woody's (4011 Cedar Springs Road) is a sports and video bar with three outdoor patio areas on its two levels—great on clear Dallas nights. The non-smoking environment upstairs is a definite plus. A strip contest on Mondays, pool tournaments on Sundays and Tuesdays, and showtunes night on Tuesdays are some of the value-added events. The three in-house video jockeys and a polite, personable staff ensure a good party all throughout the week. Visit Dallaswoodys.com for the latest on what's what.

Dallas Eagle (2515 Inwood Road, rear) is a hardcore Levi-and-leather hangout, busy after 11pm. The main bar leads on to a back bar with a pool table. A balcony overlooking the main bar heightens cruise potential. Bears, big men, and their admirers feel much at home here.

Round Up Saloon (3912 Cedar Springs Road) is dubbed the home of “good times and good people.” This large establishment contains many bars tucked within, as well as a Tequila Shack with its own “tequila master” (almost too much fun). Stop by the martini bar and meet Link, a scrumptious and funny bartender who will make your day. There's country dancing (free lessons Mondays through Thursdays) and country cruising, not to mention music videos. A game room with pool

tables, video games, pinball machines, and photo booths makes for much fun. Entertainment also includes lots of karaoke, Sunday through Thursdays. An ATM machine on premises makes things easier.

Wedged between Black Eyed Pea and Cafe Brazil, **Mickey's** (3851 Cedar Springs Road) is a video bar with multiple plasma- and flat-screen TVs playing current dance videos. Mickey's sponsors many of Dallas's gay sports teams and webcasts its own two-hour variety show every Monday with Wayne Smith as Cher. The show is watched worldwide and can be viewed at Singtoamerica.com. Mickey's Retro Sunday is legendary for its \$1 well drinks and custom retro remix videos that can only be seen here.

Hidden Door (5025 Bowser) has been a favorite Dallas bar for many years, and retains an “old school” flair. The Hidden Door's secret is its friendly staff, community involvement, great drink specials, and a laid-back atmosphere.

The Hideaway (4144 Buena Vista) is a piano-bar heaven for mature men and their admirers.

Other neighborhood watering holes include **Zippers** (3333 North Fitzhugh) and **Crews Inn** (2315 North Fitzhugh), both with plenty of hot, stripper action.

New on the scene is **Peckers** (2615 Oak Lawn Avenue), just a couple of blocks off the strip and boasting drink specials and cute bartenders.

Under the aegis of Caven Enterprises, **Station 4**, (better known as **S4**), **Throckmorton Mining Co.**, **JR's**, and **Sue Ellen's** collectively draw many visitors, both men and women, to the area. **JR's** (3923 Cedar Springs Road) comprises three levels and

a balcony that dares any weather and affords a bird's-eye view of Dallas's gay crossroads. **S4** (3911 Cedar Springs Road), Dallas's hugest hurrah, vaunts an outdoor patio, front and back balconies, a steel dance floor with intense sound and moveable intelligent lighting, plus the Rose Room theater and lounge, the Southwest's premiere show bar. You'll swear you were in a Vegas showroom. Don't miss their amazing drag shows, some of the best you'll ever see. The bi-leveled **Throckmorton Mining Co.** (3014 Throckmorton), originally meant to attract those into leather/Levi, seems to draw people of all ilk. There's even a dance floor. **Sue Ellen's** (3903 Cedar Springs Road) is geared for gals. Caven Enterprises has also created what they call “Cruisin the Crossroads” where for 30 minutes at a time each of their four bars have \$2 dollar drink specials—all part of their dastardly clever plan to keep you circulating and enjoying yourself.

Other well-trod nightspots include the mixed Afro-Caribbean and Latin **Havana** (4006 Cedar Springs Road), and **Kaliente** (4350 Maple Avenue), with an enthusiastic Mexican-American clientele.

Shopping

Leather Masters (2525 Wycliff Avenue, Suite 124)—also of San Jose, California—is now in Dallas. This unique store offers quality leather custom clothing and more.

Remarkable piercing, wearable art, and tattooing are at their best at **Obscurities** (4000-B Cedar Springs Road), where safety is the prime concern.

Crossroads Market (3930 Cedar Springs Road) touts literary treats and gay knickknacks, the latter also available at



Gary & Leo make the scene at Round Up, Dallas



The fun and friendly crew of Hunky's, Dallas



**Bartender
Mike at
Rocket
Bar,
Dallas**



**Lee, the bartender
of the gods, at
Peckers, Dallas**



**Lou from Leather
Masters, Dallas**



**Richard & Anthony
at JR's, Dallas**



**Craig, Rob, Alex, & Randy live
it up at Rocket Bar, Dallas**



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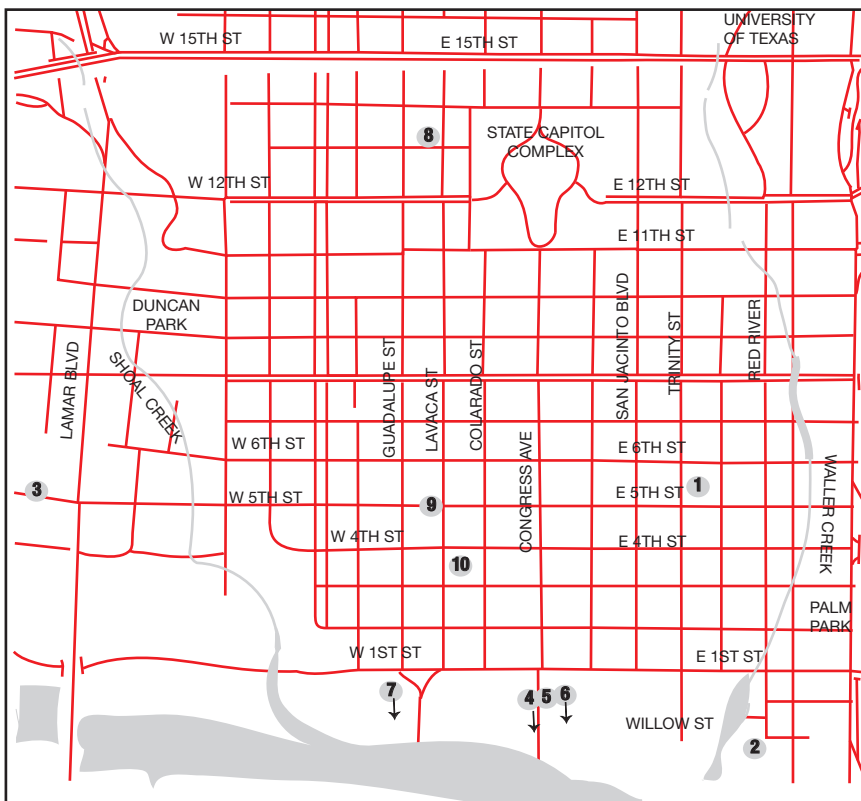
969 Park Ave.
San Jose, Ca. 95126
408-293-7660
Tues - Saturday
12:00 - 8:00pm



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AUSTIN

- 2) **Chain Drive**
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504 Willow
- 8) **Charlies / Austin**
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1301 Lavaca
- 5) **El Sol Y La Luna**
1224 S Congress
(512) 444-7770
- 1) **Forbidden Fruit**
(512) 478-8358
512 Neches
- 10) **Oilcan Harry's**
(512) 320-8823
211 W. 4th St.
- 9) **Rainbow Cattle Company**
(512) 472-5288
305 W. 5th St
- 7) **Romeo's**
(512) 476-1090
1500 Barton Springs
- 4) **San Jose Hotel**
(512) 444-7322
1316 S Congress
- 6) **Sidekicks**
(512) 804-2707
110 Riverside
- 3) **Tapelenders**
(512) 472-0844
1114 W 5th St



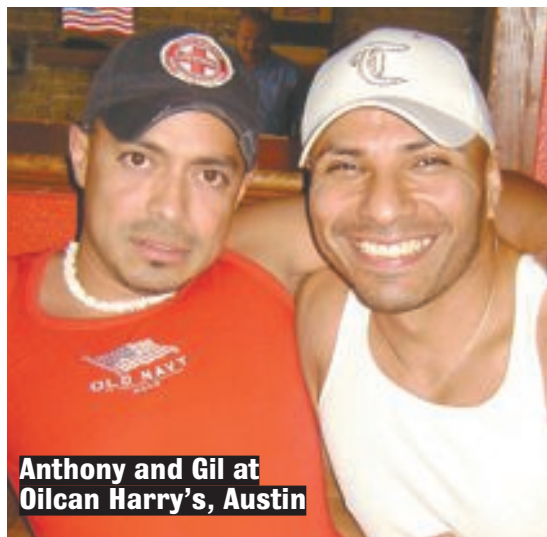
Edward and Ram at Charlie's, Austin



Revelers at Oilcan Harry's, Austin



The 'Go West' moment at Oilcan Harry's, Austin



Anthony and Gil at Oilcan Harry's, Austin

several other queer stores in the vicinity. A cruisy coffee shop tucked within is a focal meeting point in the Oak Lawn area.

The whole spectrum of rainbow shopping is also for sale at **Tape Lenders** (3926 Cedar Springs Road), **Skivvies** (4001-C Cedar Springs), and **Outlines** (3906 Cedar Springs Road).

Eat, drink, and be metro

Hunky's (4000 Cedar Springs Road) is notable not just for their cheeseburgers but also for abundant two-legged eye-candy. Other than Crossroads, this is the one place that affords great cruising potential in a virtually breeder-free gayborhood. The newest location on Bird Road in trendy Oak Cliff is larger than the Cedar Springs outpost, which usually has a line for their great fare— but it's not a problem as it's a great place to meet people. The staff is incredibly sweet, and their Hula Burgers are heavenly.

Buli (3908 Cedar Springs Road), an acronym for "Because U Love It," is the cutest little coffee shop around. This is where desserts are born. Forget the diet and dive in.

Accommodations

Dallas currently has no gay guesthouse *per se*, however many of the nicer hotels and B&Bs are quite gay-friendly.

Melrose Hotel (3015 Oak Lawn Avenue at Cedar Springs Road; 214-521-5151) is a ritzy hotel in the thick of it all. This luxury hotel also contains a restaurant and bar on premises.

Alternative gay-friendly lodgings include **Best Western** (915 West Dallas Street), a budget choice close to the scene; and **Holiday Inn Select Love Field** (3300 West Mockingbird Lane).

Getting physical and more!

Midtowne Spa (2509 Pacific) offers innumerable rooms and secret caches throughout the facility, which includes a gym featuring a Nautilus Time Machine, a two-tiered hot tub, and fantasy/theme rooms. At the top is a superb rooftop view of downtown Dallas. At this recently remodeled area, complimentary weekend cookouts are common. Whatever you do, make sure to check out their 500 gallon grotto (shades of *Blue Lagoon!*)— if that

doesn't put you in the mood, nothing will.

Club Dallas (2616 Swiss) is a physical fitness center with a regular gym and trainer on premises, along with many other amenities.

AUSTIN

This is a city comfortable in its own skin. Beautiful, laid back, and with a famous live-music scene, Austin has it all here in the middle of beautiful Texas hill and lake country. Maybe it's the heat, but there's a dream-like quality to this place.

Austin enjoys life. You'll find your inner clock slowing down just a little, and your sleep deeper and more peaceful. Leave your wristwatch at home.

If anything can rouse you out of your trance it will be the festivities at the semi-annual **Splash Day**, a traditional sun-filled (clothing optional) lakeside party on the first Sunday in May and also over Labor Day. Expect Lake Travis and its rocky shores of Hippie Hollow to be a pleasure realm. Most bars will host gala events through the weekend preceding Splash, and celebrated DJs will have the town pul-



sating with a holiday spirit.

In this bastion of liberalism, there is really no one gay section; in fact, establishments catering to gay needs are spread throughout town.

Nightlife

Charlie's Austin (1301 Lavaca) has for 22 years been a focal point of fun for Austin's gay community. With the friendly bartenders and management committed to the community, Charlie's stands out by providing exceptional service, great drink specials, \$5 Steak Night on Tuesdays, sexy Manwatch dancers, and a great outdoor patio perfect for socializing and partying. Sister bar **'Bout Time** (9601 Interstate 35 North) is a neighborhood watering hole with campy drag shows on Saturdays. Volleyball enthusiasts flock here.

Oilcan Harry's (211 West 4th Street) is a must-do in the gay scene. Upscale, this men's dance-bar showcases a large bar area, an uninhibited dance floor, an outdoor patio and bar, and a side bar with pool tables and video machines. Kick-ass parties, super after-hours, and personable bartenders have contributed to its ongoing

success. There is a wonderful sense of "controlled chaos" that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Make sure to ask them to play the Village People's "Go West"—trust me, it's a scream!

A few doors away, **Rain** (217 B West 4th Street) is a popular watering hole on weekends.

Rainbow Cattle Company (305 West 5th Street) is home to the Texas Gay Rodeo Association, Austin Baptist Women, and United Court of Austin. This is Austin's only "country cruisin'" bar

Chain Drive (504 Willow) is the only leather-and-Levi hangout bar in town. Friday nights are usually packed, and there is live music (mostly punk and alternative) on Wednesday nights, which attract a pretty wild crowd.

Shopping

Forbidden Fruit (512 Neches Street and 108 E. North Loop Boulevard), now with two locations, continues to provide "useful items for a diverse world." The items traded include jewelry, fresh flowers, erotic literature, and myriad intimate accessories.

Tape Lenders Video (1114 West 5th

Street) carries gay videos, plus gifts, cards, magazines, swim wear, and underwear.

Lodgings

San Jose Hotel (1316 South Congress; 512-693-9317) is a chic, renovated motel in the "in" neighborhood just south of the river from downtown known as South Congress. Rooms aren't cheap here, but the South Beachy/LA-ish vibe you get, as well as the happening cafe/bar and attractive heated pool and patio, make it worth it. Next door you'll want to fuel your morning with a cup of java from **Jo's** (1300 S. Congress), a hip coffee and sandwich/bakery joint. Stop by their other location at 242 West 2nd Street. Jo's is a place to see and be seen, and is wi-fi ready.

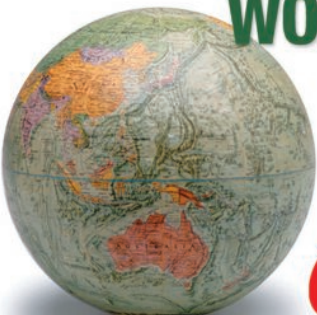
Also in the vicinity is the famous **Austin Motel** (1220 S. Congress; 512-441-1157), with its neon phallic logo beckoning. They are also high in the "cool" quotient.

Getting physical

Midtowne Spa (5815 Airport Boulevard), located next to the Highland Mall, is a premier facility throbbing with pelvic tourism. All the recreations that are common to the chain of Midtowne Spas may be availed here, including complete workout facilities.

Gold's Gym (101 West 6th Street) is the gym to work muscles other than in the groin area. Though straight-owned, this gym is gay-popular and close to many gay establishments. ▼

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