

EAST AND WEST By Elaine Warner



Wildcatter Ranch sign- that's STOP in Texan.



The Texas Electric Railway which operated from 1908 until 1948



Shops at Legacy

Whether you crave the excitement of a big city or long for the wide open spaces, North Texas offers a variety of getaways, like these two towns that deserve a closer look.

Plano, with its quarter-of-a-million-plus residents, qualifies as a big town. While it's frequently overshadowed by its neighbor to the south, Plano offers a lot of amenities all on its own. And you can access major Dallas destinations by light rail without fighting the traffic.

Graham, about 90 miles west of Denton, fills the bill for a country escape with its quaint downtown and western heritage. And the Wildcatter Ranch here provides a cowboy country retreat with comforts the cowboys never dreamed of.

The settlement that became Plano began soon after Texas won its independence from Mexico with the 1841 Peters Colony. In 1848, the first doctor in the area suggested the name "Plano" for the community because he believed it to be the Spanish word for "plain." Let's hope his medical skills were better than his Spanish.



32° at Urban Crust in Plano features a 30-foot-long ice bar.



Park view from the Marriott Dallas/Plano at Legacy Town Centre

For over a century, Plano was primarily a farming community until it got caught up in Dallas' building boom. With all its growth, the city still has a charming historic downtown with an interesting Interurban Museum. An antique interurban car sits close to the tracks where the sleek DART train travels.

Across the street is one of the best restaurants in the area: Urban Crust. In a historic 1898 building, its offerings are anything but old-fashioned. With its rooftop ice bar, 32°, it's a popular gath-

ering place for young professionals, but all ages enjoy the fabulous pizza. You'll find traditional Margherita and Quattro Formaggi, but get adventurous and try the Black and Blue – basil pesto, wood-fired sirloin, baby portobellos, caramelized onions and Maytag blue cheese.

On the west side of town is Legacy Town Centre, a large new planned development including retail, business and residential components. The area has a definite European feel with bustling sidewalks, charming shops and boutiques and an array of eateries.

Diversions *Where to Go*

It wouldn't be Texas without good Mexican food, and you'll find that here. But you'll also find Cru Wine Bar, with over 300 wines and a variety of small plates and entrees. Nicola's features fine Italian food including handmade pastas like casarecci and trofie, and pastries at the Main Street Bistro and Bakery are a real treat.

September is the perfect time to visit Plano – the 17th through the 19th is this year's annual Balloon Festival. Over six dozen colorful balloons participate in flights and glows. Other features include sky divers, fireworks, a street dance, kids' activities, balloon rides and enough fair-type food to harden the arteries of a small city.

With festival activities scheduled for mornings and evenings, you'll have time to check out one of the town's iconic attractions – Southfork Ranch – where the exterior scenes for the television show "Dallas" were shot. When Rex Maughn bought the property in 1992, he created themed rooms throughout the house.



PLANO CVB

Balloon Festival



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2009 Balloon Glow - the balloons are lit the Friday and Saturday nights of the festival



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Lucy's Room at Southfork Ranch, Plano



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Aloft Hotel, one of Plano's newest accommodations



Big Boy, longhorn steer at Wildcatter Ranch, Graham



Horseback riding is a popular option at Wildcatter Ranch – trails go through meadows of wildflowers and up rocky hills for a view of the Brazos.

Finding accommodations in the area won't be a problem. Good choices include the Marriott at Legacy Town Centre, overlooking an attractive pond and park and just steps away from the shopping area. Two new and non-traditional hotels are Nylo and Aloft. Nylo is described as an "ultramodern boutique hotel with loft-style accommodations." That could describe Aloft, too – a hotel so hip that it even has a signature fragrance.

If Nylo and Aloft project the 21st century, Wildcatter Ranch in Graham will take you back to the 1800s. Pack up your iPhone and worries and get ready to relax.

The 1,500-acre ranch features lush riparian areas and rugged hills. The Brazos River meanders along the edge of the property and provides a pleasant stretch of water for canoeing.

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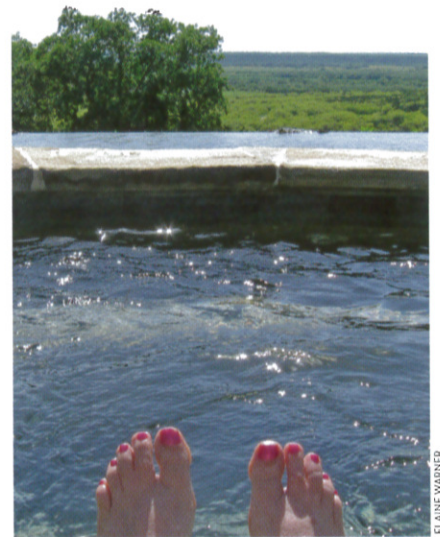
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Diversions *Where to Go*



Hot tub and infinity pool at Wildcatter Ranch



Pastries at Main Street Bakery

Other activities include horseback riding, hiking, biking, bird watching, fossil hunting, sand volleyball, basketball, tetherball, fishing, archery, shooting sporting clays and swimming. Or you can lounge in the hot tub, get a massage in the spa or just enjoy a rocking chair. There's a gift shop on the ranch, and in town you'll find some interesting shops and an upscale art gallery in an old church.

As you head back to the ranch you'll pass a pasture with a herd of longhorns. Join a morning group and you can feed them. They're gentle, but looking at those horns, a variant on Ralphie's mother's admonition came to my mind: "You'll put your eye out!" Big Boy, the prince of the pasture, has a horn-spread of 98 inches – the third largest in Texas. You can feed them pellets by hand, but