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DIARY OF A SADIST

HOUSTON'S HOTSPOTS

**THE GAY DETECTIVE:
A NEW KIND OF HERO**

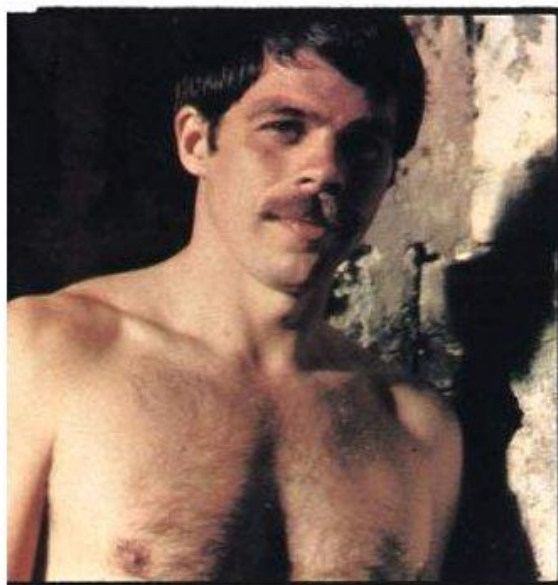
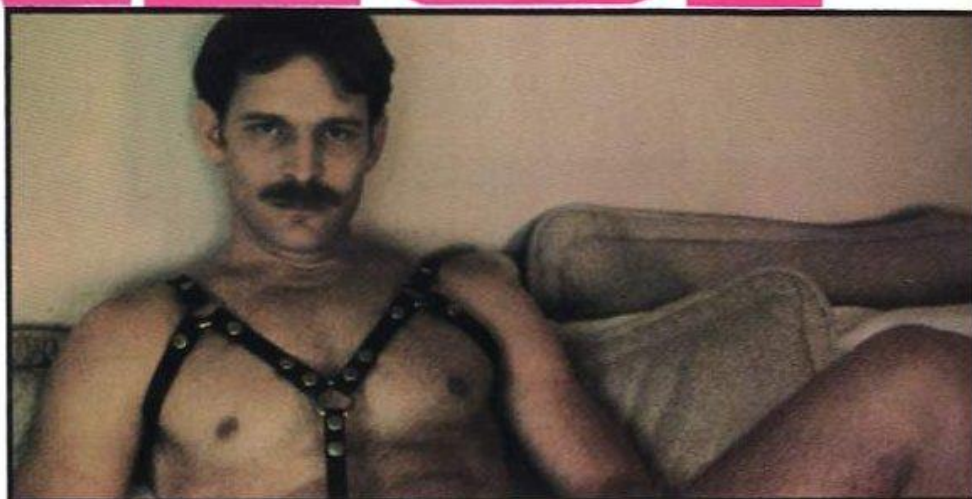
**LEATHER
AND DENIM**

TOUGH VISUALS

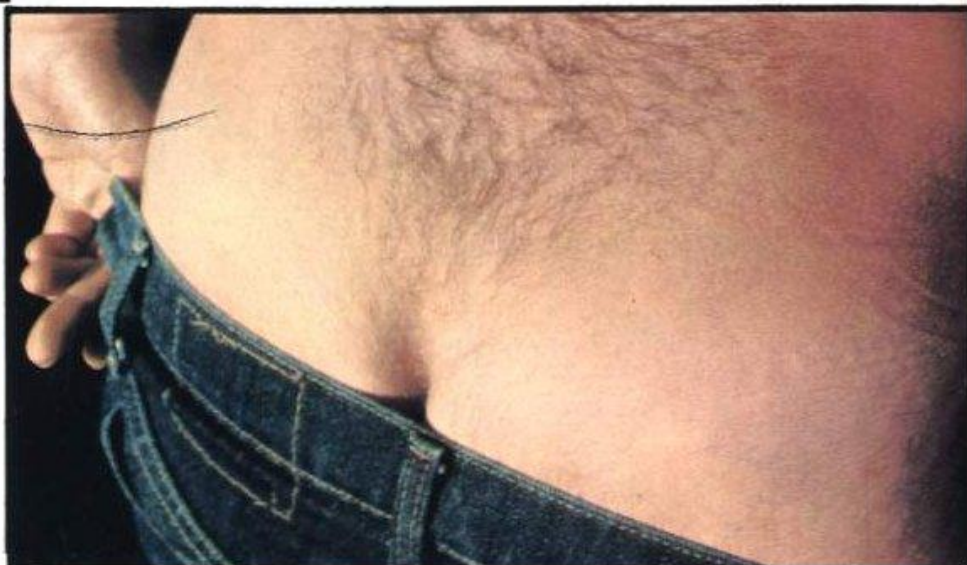
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DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS: GAY HOUSTON

BY SCOTT HEUMANN

Numbers takes you to Houston, which boasts the hottest gay community in the sunbelt, and discovers that there is no shortage of gay pride in the land of the longhorns.





If you drive down Allen Parkway towards downtown Houston, passing by the striking Henry Moore sculpture on its grassy knoll—and if you can tear your eyes away from the body sculpture jogging by, lean and sweaty and clad in micro-shorts—the stunning view of the skyline may remind you of that moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy and her friends first spied the Emerald City.

It's a fact that Houston's traffic jams and other urban problems, brought about by booming population growth, can be intimidating. Many's the newcomer from Kansas who has clicked the heels of those ruby slippers and muttered, "There's no place like home," and even longtime Munchkins have been known to trade their hometown's high-pressure lifestyle for the laid-back charms of San Francisco or Seattle. But for those of us who love Houston, there are always compensations.

Houston's oil-based economy has made it a showcase for modern architecture by such names as I.M. Pei, Philip Johnson and S.I. Morris. The city has one of the top five opera companies in the nation, a ballet company that has leaped from obscurity to national prominence in half a decade, a major symphony orchestra, notable theater, and two art museums. Houston has superb restaurants, and an exciting nightlife.

So what is the "typical" gay Houstonian like? Since the city has an unusually high percentage of young adults in the population, the gay Houston male is likely to be between 20 and 40 years old, and career-oriented. Gay professionals here outnumber "professional gays," and

Houston is also the gay Mecca of the Southwest, and the largest city in Texas, a state known for its beautiful men. That fact alone keeps many Houstonians from leaving. (Who cares about being stuck in traffic on the Southwest Freeway if that hand on your thigh belongs to a humpy hitchhiker in cowboy boots?) Anyone who doubts the growing gay influence on this onetime redneck stronghold simply hasn't been around for the last couple of elections. Mayor Kathryn Whitmire owes at least part of her victory over "good ol' boy" Sheriff Jack Heard to the bloc vote orchestrated by Houston's Gay Political Caucus, and to extensive campaigning by gay volunteers. Local politicians began to take gays seriously when a city councilman of many years' tenure called homosexuals "oddwads" on TV and was promptly ousted and replaced by his female opponent who had the GPC endorsement. Now at least three city council members owe a good measure of their political success to gay support. Even the Democratic candidate in the Texas gubernatorial race in November was sufficiently impressed with gay clout in Houston to send his wife to represent him at a GPC function.



the guy in the denim bar with the Arnold Schwarzenegger pecs under his torn teeshirt is more likely to be an oil company junior exec than an oil-rig roustabout. He is an inner-city apartment dweller and has his own car (and you'd better have one, too, since Houston's public transportation is notoriously inadequate). He takes his body very seriously and either plays sports, jogs or works out at one of two gay gyms, Jim's Gym or The Fitness Exchange. He enjoys movies/music/opera/dance/theater/art of the above. He is a "conspicuous consumer," which may explain why mall cruising seems to have replaced park cruising, and why the Galleria shopping center on a Saturday resembles an enormous gay bar.

Sexually speaking, there's no telling what the gay Houstonian is likely to be into, onto or up to; there's something for every taste. If you want to discover gay Houston in all its variety, then ignore the suburban areas outside Loop 610 (the freeway that encircles the inner city). Go immediately to Montrose, near downtown, one of Houston's oldest and most colorful neighborhoods. Saying "I live in the Montrose," you'll discover, is virtually the same thing as saying "I suck cock." A large number of gay bars and businesses—intmixed with liberal-minded straight establishments—occupies the so-called "hot end" of Westheimer and its adjacent streets.

The Westheimer Strip looks incredibly seedy by day, but at night it takes on a certain lurid glamor. Under the neon lights, angelic blond hustlers with jeans bulging, arms tattooed, compete for car-borne "johns" with transvestite hookers in movie-queen drag. Elegant hetero couples on their way to a restaurant before the show bump shoulders with the butch clones who are headed for a "bookstore" (that being the popular euphemism for ten minutes of pornfilm in a dark booth and a blowjob through the glory hole). On a weekend night, when you're high on grass or ludes or just a couple of Scotch-and-waters, the Strip whispers alluringly of freedom...adventure...sin. When no one seems to have anything in particular to accomplish beyond a couple of stiff erections, the atmosphere can be electric with unfocused energy.

Mary's (1022 Westheimer) is the soul of the Strip, and a Houston institution. The color of its garish exterior changes frequently; it's likely to be red-white-and-blue for Gay Pride Week, or royal purple, or S&M black, plastered with slogans. When a production of *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* played the Tower Theatre across the street, Mary's sign painter had a field day ("Mary's: The Whoriginal and Still the Best"). After all, how could that pathetic little bordello in LaGrange ever hope to compare with the glory of Mary's back room?

The police and the suburban rednecks like to pick on

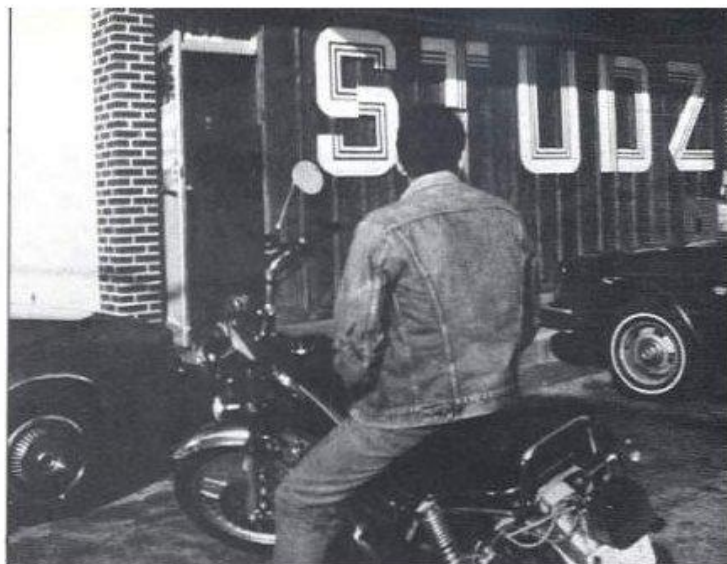


Mary's. The bar has been raided, and last summer the driver of a pickup truck fired a shotgun through Mary's back fence and into the courtyard, seriously wounding a man. But in spite of these incidents, Mary's goes on, "mad, bad and dangerous to know," its clientele ranging from the very hottest members of the denim and leather set all the way down to the most bizarre street people this side of Rollerena. How you respond to Mary's may depend on your mood. I once saw a clone slap a dwarf clear across the courtyard for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, and I left, disgusted. But the dwarf stayed.

Down the street from Mary's, in the heart of hustler territory, is The Midnite Sun (534 Westheimer), fondly called "The Midnite Scum" by Montrose residents. Hustling boys, with pimp in tow, work the front bar, while the busy disco in the back attracts a broad cross-section of the neighborhood: hot white boys on drugs, would-be sugar daddies, exuberant blacks, flashy drags and, on occasion, a lone pair of straight "swingers," blissful at having discovered "true sleaze."

Sleaze is a time-honored Southern tradition—what would a Bible Belt city be without its vice district, the escape valve on the pressure cooker? But sleaze is not all there is to the Montrose. The other side of the coin is perhaps best represented by Baja's (402 Lovett), once an elegant two-story residence, now a restaurant-cabaret. Don't expect to pick up a one-night stand at Baja's. It's been done, of course, but mainly this is a place where buddies socialize, where lovers celebrate anniversaries, where you can converse and be heard, where you can dress up and not feel conspicuous, where you can enjoy good entertainment and good food. Baja's chief competition is Rascals, another restaurant-cabaret so high-toned it's almost *outside* the Montrose (2702 Kirby); you could probably take your mother there. Also highly sociable and borderline-respectable is everybody's favorite piano bar, Keyboard (3012 Milam). Again, forget about cruising; but if you have a yen to perform, chances are you'll get your turn at the microphone, along with the waiters, the managers and every other would-be Peter Allen/Barbra Streisand in the place. Expect to get high and happy.

Houston has 33 traditional gay clubs, plus three more gay restaurants, four gay baths, eight gay "bookstores" and one adult theater catering to gays, the French Quarter (3201 Louisiana). Wanna dance? The biggest, gayest and wildest disco in town is Numbers (300 Westheimer). The computerized laser light show creates a mind-boggling range of designs, from Pegasus in flight to "Happy Birthday." Urban cowboys into country-western dancing can sashay down to the Brazos River bottom (2400



Brazos), The Barn (710 Pacific) or Miss Charlotte's Dance Hall and Saloon (911 W. Drew), all located conveniently close to one another.

Got the munchies for a twinkie? Try the Copa (2631 Richmond), which hosts drag shows on Sundays and Tuesdays. Mildly preppie types and college boys cruise J.R.'s (808 Pacific) while clones generally head for the Montrose Mining Co. (805 Pacific) or the Venture-N (2923 S. Main). Heavy-duty leather/levi numbers hand out at The Drum (1732 Westheimer) and The Loading Dock (1735 Westheimer) when they're not at Mary's—but be forewarned: dress codes are strictly enforced, and you can get kicked out of The Loading Dock for wearing cologne.

Among several neighborhood bars, The Galleon (2303 Richmond) and The Hole (109 Tuam) are the friendliest. The Hole has an upstairs "cabaret" called "The Top of the Hole" where a campy Hawaiian named Keoki Kona provides the entertainment. The customers are so loyal that when the bar was damaged by fire, the regulars all chipped in and bought Keoki a new organ (Wurlitzer variety, that is).

Right now the hottest new bar in town is The Officers Club (2700 Albany), which despite its name is *not* off-limits to enlisted men. The elegant building was one (or so I'm told) a posh retirement home, and later the site of the famed Farmhouse disco, still fondly remembered. (Legend has it that the Farmhouse was put out of business for challenging the Mafia monopoly on gay bars. A couple of strategic murders of departing customers, and *voilà*—business evaporated overnight. But that was in another era, and the mob has since gone on to more lucrative ventures.) Today The Officers Club boasts one of Houston's more spacious cruise bars and an outdoor swimming pool which in spring and summer becomes a playground for male pulchritude. The management is adding a dance floor and hopes to convert the building's second story into a hotel.

Gay life in Houston does not necessarily revolve around the bars and baths. Some 70 gay organizations provide services, support and alternative social outlets for almost every segment of the community. Jewish, Episcopal, Catholic, Unitarian and atheist gays have their own groups. BWMT serves "Black and White Men Together," Astro Rainbow Alliance offers a haven for the hearing-impaired, and Gay Men with Straight Wives provides counsel for "mixed" marriages. As one might expect in a city with so many gay professionals, there are groups called "Gay and Lesbian Engineers and Scientists," "Lesbian/Gay People in Medicine" and "Houston Data Professionals" (also gay). The Professional and Executive



Council, which acts as a support group and professional referral service, also raises funds for worthy causes, such as the Kaposi's Sarcoma Committee. Meanwhile, back on the Strip, the year-old Montrose Clinic gives medical advice and help to battle-scarred veterans of the bar wars and bookstore circuit.

Although locals were embarrassed when the Montrose Sports Association failed to send athletes to the recent Gay Olympic Games in San Francisco, the MSA is nevertheless a large and active group. Preferred sports are bowling, pool, racquetball, softball, tennis and volleyball (and the men's softball team is worth watching even if you don't like softball). Musical groups are also thriving, notably the Montrose Singers, the Montrose Chorale and the Montrose Symphonic and Marching Band, which is going to New York in the spring to perform in Carnegie Hall. Gay theater, too, has found its niche at Stages (709 Franklin), where *Bent* and *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You* played to sold-out houses.

When should the gay tourist visit Houston? Mid-October is a good time. The city's weather is on its very best behavior, and you can catch the Westheimer Art Festival—always a treat for man-watchers—and maybe the opening of the Houston Grand Opera season. (The Opera audience and the Houston Ballet audience are as entertaining as anything on the stage. The Opera's Sunday matinees at Jones Hall are always well attended by gays from every major city in Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma, so the Saturday night *before* is a prime time to catch opera buffs in the buff at the Club Houston baths, 2205 Fannin.)

If possible, skip the rainiest months in Houston, January and June—although you may want to brave the June floods anyway, just to enjoy Gay Pride Week. Spring shows the city at its verdant best, as flowers bloom and Houston men shed their clothes. The scenery, human and otherwise, can be spectacular.

February through mid-May is also the time when the arts bloom in Houston. Here are some "peak weeks" in 1983.

February 25-March 4: On the 25th choose among the following—the Texas Chamber Orchestra and Houston Opera Studio in Martinu's *Comedy on the Bridge*, a program by the Concert Chorale of Houston (the city's only fully professional chorus), or a recital by the legendary classical guitarist Segovia. Violinist Salvatore Accardo appears with the Houston Symphony Orchestra on the 26th, soprano Leontyne Price sings a recital in Jones Hall on the 27th, and the male "ballerinas" of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo provide the week's campy finale March 3-4. During the week, the Alley Theatre will present Durrenmatt's *The Visit*. Stages will be



doing Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and the Museum of Fine Arts will exhibit Japanese paintings and the photographs of Ansel Adams.

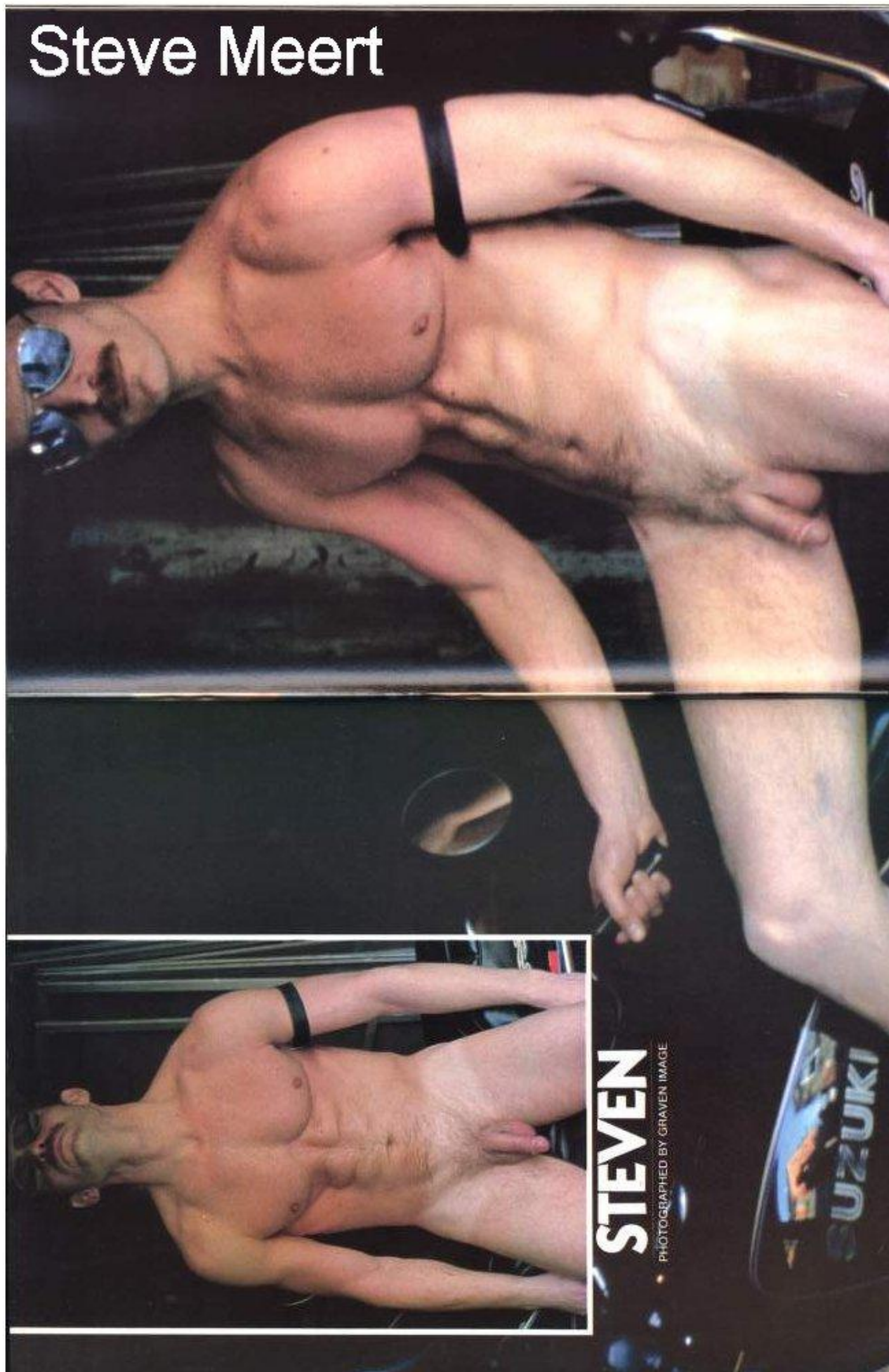
March 17-27: The Houston Festival, an entertaining free-for-all involving performances by nearly every theater or musical organization in the city, gourmet food booths, and displays of public art, takes over downtown for the duration, while the doyenne of musical humor, Anna Russell, holds forth at Jones Hall March 18; the Houston Symphony performs Liszt's *Dante* symphony March 19-20; the Alley Theatre presents *The Visit* and Amlin Gray's *How I Got That Story* through the week; and on the 26th there's a choice between Houston Grand Opera's *The Merry Widow* with Ashley Putnam, or Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with tenor Charles Bressler and the Concert Chorale.

April 28-May 12: You can attend a concert by the Juilliard String Quartet April 28, the Opera's *The Tales of Hoffman* with Nicolai Gedda April 29, and a Symphony concert with violinist Dimitry Sitkovetsky April 30. Daniel Barenboim conducts L'Orchestre de Paris in Jones Hall May 3, and the young American winner of the Karajan Competition, Ronald Braunstein, conducts the Texas Chamber Orchestra May 6. On May 7 the great Dutch soprano Elly Ameling appears with the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Stay until the 12th, and catch Houston's Ballet's first performance of Ashton's *Two Pigeons*. And at the Museum of Fine Arts, you can see major shows devoted to Pennsylvania German art and the English mystic poet and engraver William Blake.

While you're in the city, spend some time seeing the sights outside of Montrose—historic Bayou Bend estate, Sam Houston Park (with its collection of 19th-century homes lovingly restored), Rothko Chapel (devoted to the last, dark paintings of abstract expressionist Mark Rothko), NASA Space Center, the Astrodome, the Galleria, and especially the nearby island city of Galveston with its beaches and historic Strand sector. Splash Day, the official opening of Galveston's public beaches, occurs in May, and you won't want to miss all the tanned and oiled musculature on display. Stewart Beach is the "unofficial" gay beach; there are also six gay bars in Galveston, the best-known being Mary's II (2502 Q $\frac{1}{2}$ St.) and Kon-Tiki (214 23rd St.).

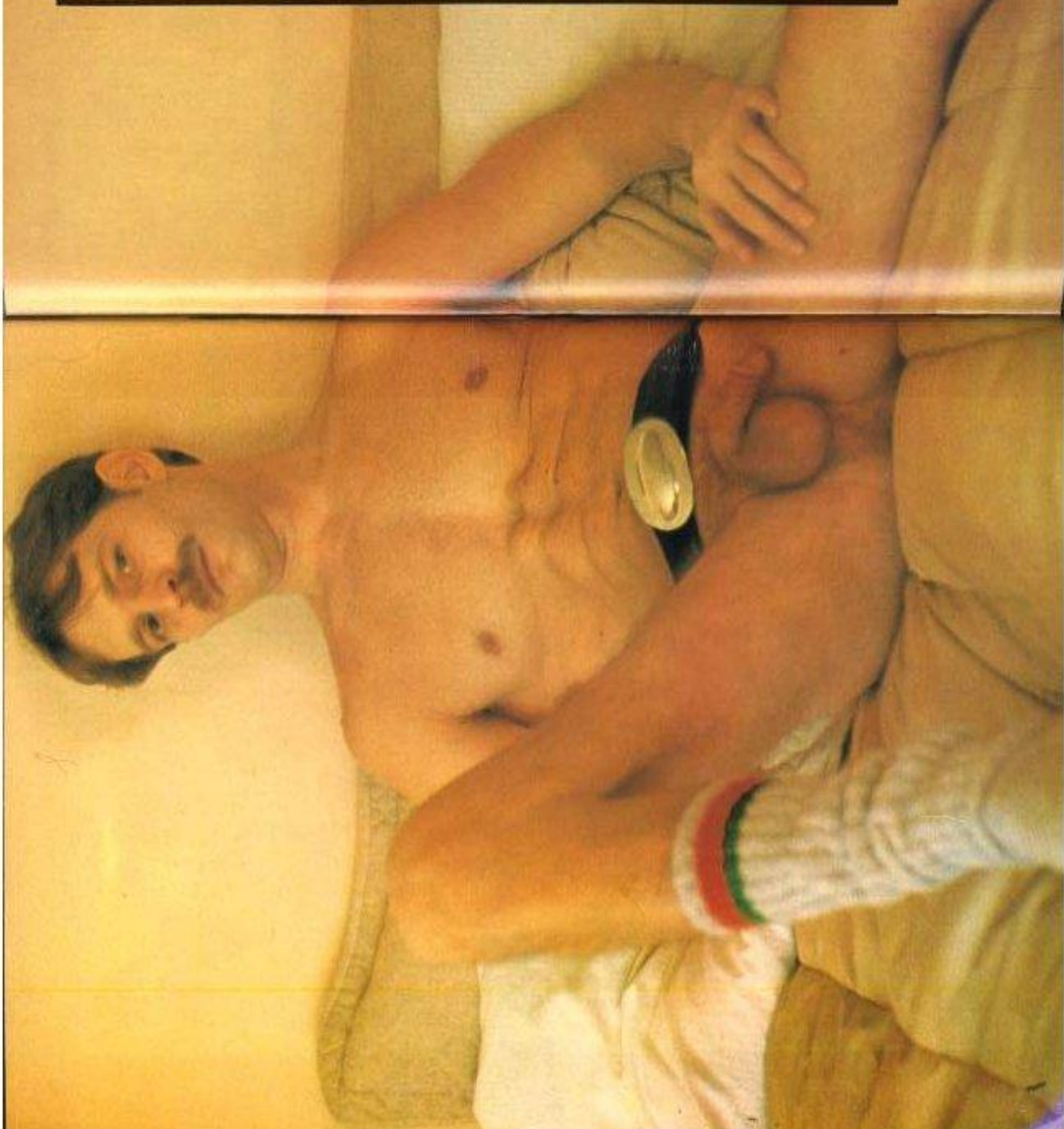
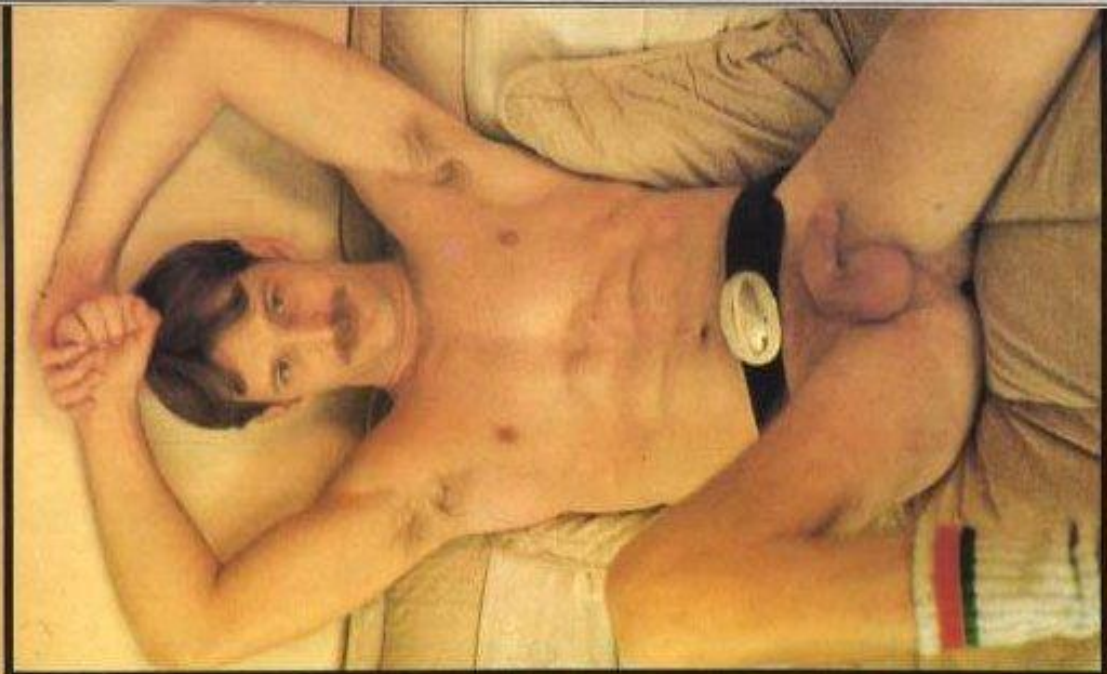
For more information on tourist attractions in the Houston/Galveston area, contact the Greater Houston Convention and Visitor's Council, 3300 Main, Houston, TX 77002. Whether you're looking for sun, fine arts, high times, or just clean and lanky urban cowboy with a knowing look under his broad-brimmed hat, Houston is the place to come—the capital city of the gay Southwest. ●

Steve Meert



STEVEN

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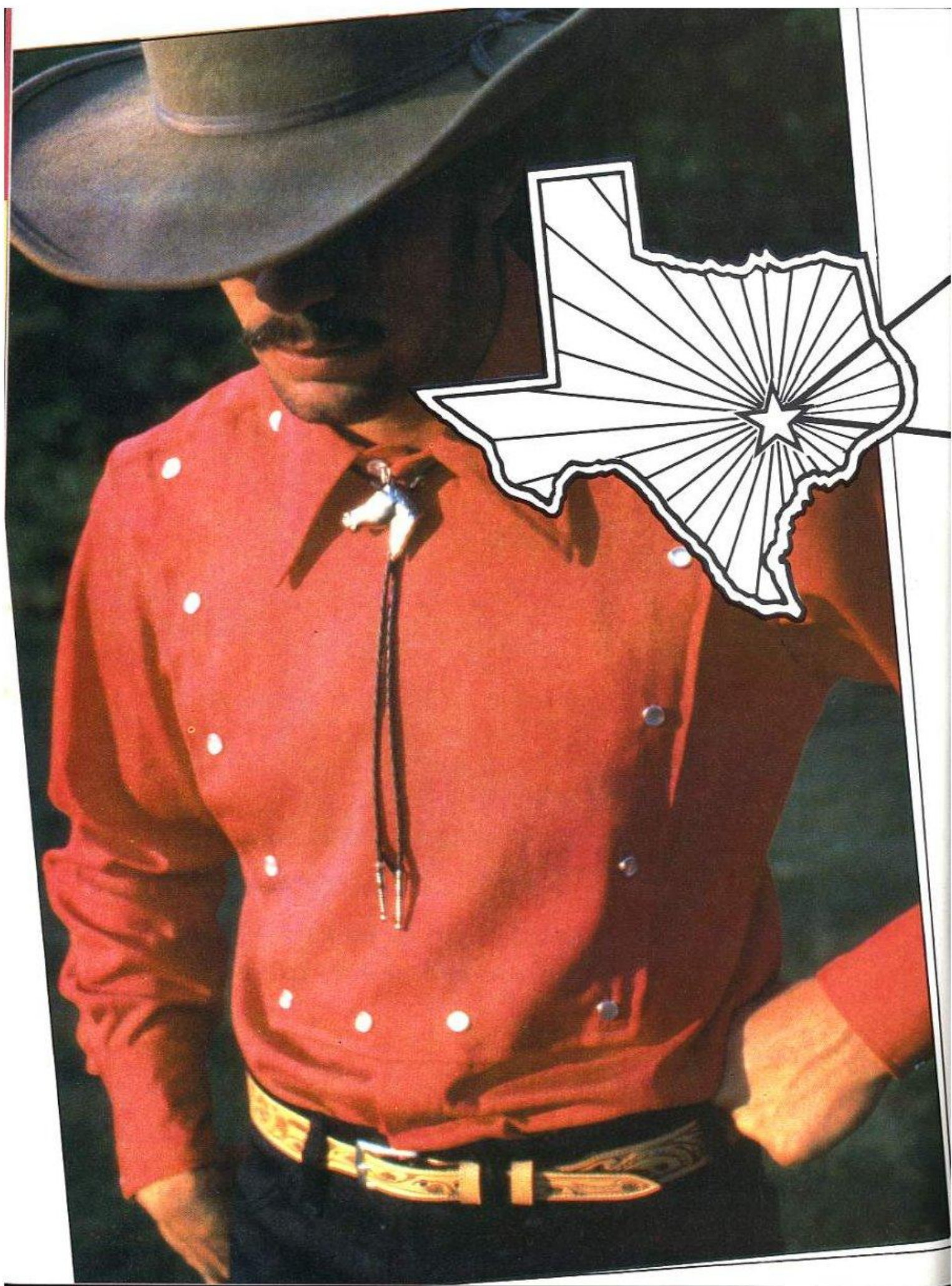


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CRUISING TEXAS



by ROBERT RALPH

WHILE A LOT OF COVERAGE HAS BEEN given to the major cities in Texas, there is a wealth of fabulous, lesser-known side trips which can be taken during a fly-in visit to the Lone Star State. Using Houston as a base of operations, and considering it as the hub of a wheel from which to proceed, many spots of interest attract the gay traveler who really wants to experience more of what Texas has to offer.

In the far-flung environs of Houston itself, you should take a trip to the NASA Space Center and Museum. Also, see the San Jacinto Monument and Battlefield. It was here that the fledgling Republic of Texas fought and won its independence from Mexico. This is one of the most carefully documented historical sites in the state and for history buffs it is a must. As with some native New Yorkers who have never been to the top of the Empire State Building or to the Statue of Liberty, many Houstonians will look at you like you're crazy if you express an interest in these out-of-the-way areas and press for details. Don't be deterred; try to work them in.

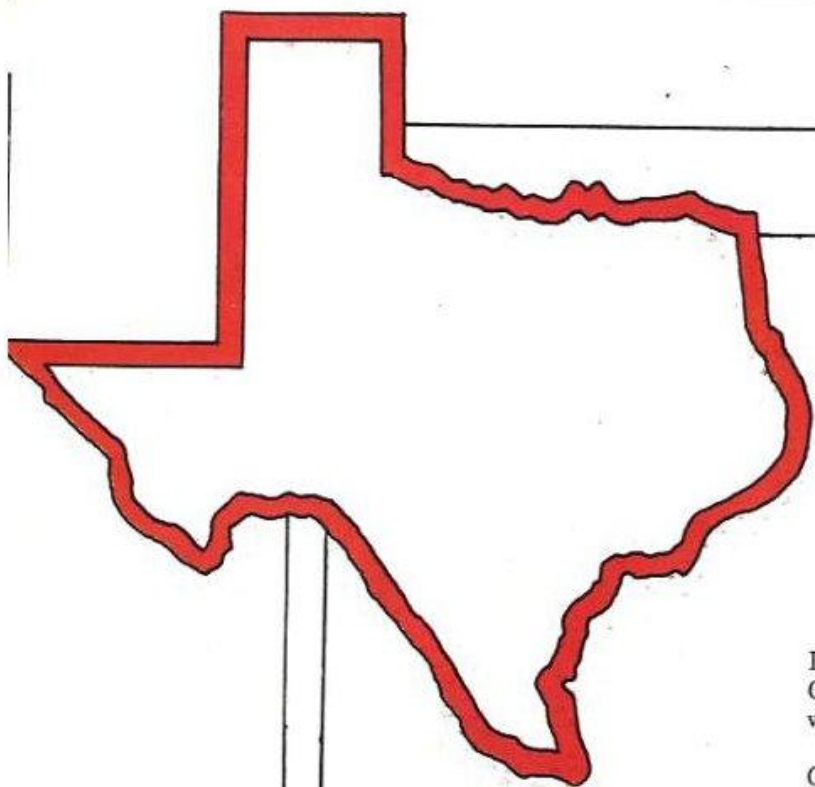
A jaunt to the Varner-Hogg Plantation will provide a detailed insight into the Southern way of life which passed into history at the end of the Civil War.

The absolute opposite side of the coin from the Varner-Hogg residence is the Heaven on Earth Plantation (yes, that's *really* the name!). This is a sprawling, difficult to explain creation that is rather like a Walt Disney remake of *Gone With The Wind*, using Stella Dallas as artistic director. It is a case of *more is more* when it comes to decoration and is so campy and fun that you shouldn't deny yourself the pleasure of seeing this extravaganza. Any similarity to what life was truly like



a hundred years ago is purely coincidental. The proprietors seem to take it and themselves very seriously, but don't let that keep you from having a delightful and laughable visit.

Gourmets will want to seek out the Hilltop Herb Farm in Cleveland, just north of Houston, to partake of some of the best and most unusual food in Texas. Seating is for a specified number in its greenhouse atmosphere amid lots of plants and hanging baskets. The setting is extremely romantic and reservations must be obtained weeks in advance. Liquor is not served or allowed on the premises.



THE GULF COAST

Approximately fifty miles south of Houston on Interstate 45, (an excellent highway all the way) are the Gulf Coast and Galveston Island, which beckon sun and water lovers a good part of the year.

Stewart's Beach is without question *the* gay beach in Galveston. Although in recent times other areas on the island have laid claim to the title, Stewart's Beach is where the largest concentration of interesting gay men and women can be found during the season. Starting with Splash Day in early May, the beach is usually packed on weekends all summer, well into September. Wild, flamboyant dress and behavior are the mode of the day, and the general atmosphere is very festive. The bathhouse area can be cruisy, especially the changing room and showers, if you can brave the cold water! The food offered there isn't the greatest in the world, and it's best to take your own if staying for the day.

There is one word of caution: The local police at Stewart's Beach seem to be paranoid about the gay scene and will react at the least provocation. Be sure to obey all parking signs and do not—repeat: *do not*—have any glass objects or containers of any sort on the sand itself. This is a no-no which could land the guilty party in jail, coupled with a severe fine disproportionate to the offense. I have seen people handcuffed and bodily removed from the beach for this, as well as for noncompliance with rules that prohibit drinking alcoholic beverages and smoking marijuana. Aside from these negative aspects, Stewart's Beach is to be enjoyed and many delightful hours can be passed lolling and cruising. Even a simple walk from one end of the beach to the other is worth it, as it will undoubtedly be packed with hunky guys of every description.

A leisurely stroll along the Seawall is visually interesting and can lead to one-on-one encounters. A medley of types and ages will be found showing it off in varying degrees of undress.

The Strand Surplus is the best place to shop for all uniform enthusiasts and for anybody else who wants to change his looks. Known with affection as Colonel Booby's, it is room after room of Army-Navy-Marine surplus clothes and gear. Also, hats, patches, buttons, insignia, accoutrements. A great stop to find exactly the right image you want to project, either for a one-time party—or permanently.

