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The Degustateer and the Samurai Sommelier –by Susan Cashin

Saturday mid-afternoon found this Degustateer whizzing up I-35 heading north towards Dallas to attend the 2nd Annual Texas Sommelier Association Conference being held at the Four Seasons Resort & Club at Los Colinas. My mission and quest this time was to join in a convergence of many of the finest minds and talents in today's wine industry. To meet my first Samurai Sommelier was the complete surprise of the conference and that story will eventually be revealed.

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The Brunch Bunch

You don't need to get up early in Austin to claim a table at brunch. There is no shortage of great options for a leisurely weekend late morning meal. With the arrival of cool air, a meal outside once again has become enjoyable. So start thinking beyond breakfast tacos, and make plans to discover some of the city's tasty brunch offerings...

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A World Class Get-Away

by Rona Distenfeld

Think you have to get on a plane or get away from Central Texas to find a world-class way to relax? Not so.

Just a short drive away, atop one of San Antonio's highest hills, one of the World's Best Places to Stay (according to Conde Nast Traveler) draws gourmands,...

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Member Profile:

Clara Bradbury

by Trish Bales



"When was the first time you had a sip of wine?"

I knew it was practically an impossible question to answer, but Clara Bradbury tried hard to find out. She even called her mother back home to see if she could remember...

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FEATURE ARTICLES

[Letter from the President Michael Vilim](#)



[Hoover Alexander of Hoover's Cooking: Smoke, Fire & Ice House](#) by Rebecca Robinson, photography by Stacy Sodalak

[Cranberries Add the Perfect Flair to Holiday Cocktails](#) by Trish Bales



Letter from the President Michael Vilim

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Letter from the President Michael Vilim



On the heels of the Texas Sommelier Association's TEXSOM 2006 Sommelier Conference in Dallas, we are inspired and more excited than ever about our upcoming fall season full of unique classes, spectacular

events and innovation programs. The sold-out Sommelier conference was held at the Dallas Four Seasons at Los Colinas, and provided wine students at all levels of expertise with top-rate seminars and panels on a broad range of topics. A dynamic assembly of educators and world-renowned experts were assembled, allowing participants ask questions, explore and experience a level of education that has been unrivaled in our state. For future information on the conference, visit the Texas Sommelier

Field of Dreams – Wednesday, October 18th

Join us for a grand slam ballpark tasting of wine and cuisine. Held at the beautiful United Heritage Center at the Dell Diamond, this tasting will be held overlooking the Round Rock Express ballpark. Stroll out to the field for some truly special fare and enjoy remarkable wines on the terrace. Proceeds benefit The Wine & Food Foundation of Texas and the Nolan Ryan Foundation. Purchase your reservations online through October 18th or until the event is sold out.

Dallas Event – Stephan Pyles Celebrity Chef Dinner – Sunday, November 12th

Held for the first time in the city of its founder, this crown jewel of Foundation culinary events will be held in Stephan Pyles new restaurant in Dallas – aptly named, Stephan Pyles. Truly an unforgettable culinary experience, five extraordinary courses will be offered featuring five different celebrity chefs. Look for your

A World Class Get-Away

by Rona Distenfeld



Think you have to get on a plane or get away from Central Texas to find a world-class way to relax? Not so.

Just a short drive away, atop one of San Antonio's highest hills, one of "The World's Best Places to Stay" (according to *Conde Nast Traveler*) draws gourmands, romancing couples, golf enthusiasts, business travelers, and families from around the world. From the moment you arrive, the friendly, helpful staff is waiting to pamper you, right down to helping you fulfill a life-long dream or heart's desire. Always wanted to cook alongside an award-winning chef? Learn to play the guitar? Dance the tango? This is your chance to make that dream come true.

Park The Car and Settle In.

While the museums, shopping, and dining experiences of San Antonio may call to some, the Westin La Cantera offers all the action and relaxation you'll want. Two top-rated golf courses, a complete spa, multiple pools, tennis courts, shopping, and more are right on site and convenient shuttle buses are on call to take you around the resort and off-site to explore the renowned Shops at La Cantera or enjoy the thrills of Fiesta Texas.

Settle in for a drink in one of the many lounge areas throughout the resort. Large, deep armchairs and couches make you want to put your feet up, and in the cooler months you can toast your tootsies by a roaring fire.

Workout or Get Worked On

The resort's Castle Rock Health Club & Spa boasts a state-of-the-art facility with more than enough equipment to keep you moving. A Reebok Core Training Zone is at the heart of the Westin *WORKOUTSM*, with specially designed equipment to give you a complete workout. You can arrange to work with one of the fitness specialists to tailor a program, or refine what you're already doing.

With or without a workout, be sure to take advantage of the many spa offerings. From foot reflexology to seaweed facials to full body massage, the spa offers something for every part of your body. The therapists are professionally trained and very experienced. They understand that no two people are exactly alike and they focus on making your experience perfectly suit your needs and expectations.

Tee Off on Two Award-Winning Courses

The resort boasts two top-rated golf courses, making this a Golf Magazine Gold Medal Resort for 2004 -2005 and putting it on Conde Nast's Gold List for "Top Golf Resorts Around the World". The Palmer Course, designed by golfing legend Arnold Palmer, challenges skilled golfers from tee to green. This Par-71 course is set among spectacular views of the natural landscape.

The Resort Course, designed by golf course architect Jay Morrish and PGA Tour professional Tom Weiskopf is host to the PGA's Valero Texas Open at La Cantera. The course winds through the Texas Hill Country and is known for its breathtaking views, the most famous being the sheer, 80-foot drop from the 7th tee to the fairway.

Don't Worry About the Kids

While you're getting your time to relax, your kids have their own special activities. If they're between the ages of five and twelve, you can enroll them in the resort's seasonal Enchanted Rock Kid's Club. There are 2 four-hour sessions each day, plus an evening session on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

Trained activity coordinators get your kids involved in both indoor and outdoor activities.



Then head for dinner at Francesca's. The resort's signature restaurant has been a AAA Four Diamond Award winner four years in a row, and boasts an impressive wine list. You can make a meal just trying all the amazing appetizers, such as the Ancho Simmered Venison Chili, the Ahi Tuna 'Poke' Heart of Palm Timbale, and the Banana Leaf Wrapped Yucatan Chicken Tamale. Be sure to get there early enough to catch the sunset, too. Every table has a view of the sky streaking pink and purple as the sun dips below the Texas hills.

More casual dining is also an option at the La Cantera Grille, with its golf-course view, and Brannon's Café. While the ambience is less formal than Francesca's, the attention to detail in the kitchen is no less exacting.



After dinner, be sure to stop by Steinheimer's Bar for a libation, a visit to the cigar bar, and a good look at the map on the ceiling. Legend has it that Karl Steinheimer stole and buried the gold meant for payroll during the Civil War. He was killed, and while he left a map of sorts, the actual location was lost with him. Maybe you'll be the lucky one who one day finds the buried gold!

involved in both indoor and outdoor activities, from arts and crafts to nature hikes. Plus, every child gets a gift — a child-size backpack with a beverage container that may be filled free at every meal, a resort passport where they can keep of record of what they did, a disposable camera, and more.

Or spend time with your kids at the Quarry Pool. A long, curving water slide is a favorite with kids of all ages, and you can keep an eye on them from the comfort of one of the many poolside chaise lounges. The inside of the waterfall is a favorite spot for taking a breather, and there are balls, float tubes, and a volleyball net to encourage water games.

There are two other pools and a hot tub for adults only so you don't have to worry about disturbing grown-up guests. Fiesta Texas is just a quick shuttle ride away, too. No parking hassle, just ride the shuttle right to the door.

Shopping as an Outdoor Activity

The Shops at La Cantera is an outdoor setting offering many of your favorite national retailers as well as local merchants. This colorful arcade is designed to remind you of the outdoor markets of Mexico, but with lovely upscale shops instead of stalls.

Benches are strategically placed so you can stroll and relax at will. A large and colorful playscape invites younger children to let off some energy while their parents watch from shaded vantage points.

With shops offering merchandise from around the world and a world-class resort to pamper you, there's no need to travel far for a memorable get away. Come for a week or weekend and you'll see why Conde Nast Traveler put the Westin La Cantera on the Gold List of "The World's Best Places to Stay" for 2004, 2005 and 2006.

If you go:

Westin La Cantera

16641 La Cantera Parkway
San Antonio, Texas 78256
(800) WESTIN-1
(210) 558-6500
www.westinlacantera.com

The Shops at La Cantera

15900 La Cantera Parkway
San Antonio, Texas 78256
(21) 582-6255
www.theshopsatlacantera.com

Rona Distenfeld is an Austin-based freelance writer who covers travel, adventure, and the finer things in life for magazines and newspapers around the country when she's not pursuing her main loves: dancing, playing the mandolin, and riding her Harley.

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Cranberries Add the Perfect Flair to Holiday Cocktails