

ROAD TRIP

BY CLAUDIA ALARCÓN

WAY OUT WEST

For many Central Texans, a fall trip to West Texas is a tradition. Some enjoy camping in the Big Bend, others prefer the quirky Old West/artsy community of Marfa. I am personally partial to Marathon. This small West Texas outpost is well worth the six-hour drive, for many reasons: the desert mountain landscapes, the mix of old cowboy and hippy culture, the feeling of truly having escaped to another time and place. Marathon may be located in the middle of nowhere, but it offers many surprises, not all of them necessarily rural.

The following are three of my favorite places in and around Marathon. For me, they're a must-visit whenever I get the chance to make the trip West.

People come from as far away as New York City and Europe to experience the charms of the historic **Gage Hotel**, founded in 1927 and renovated in inimitable West Texas style. The owners recently added new guest accommodations, the Desert Moon Spa, and a 7.5-acre botanical garden where native plants and many species of local and migrating birds thrive.



But though many people have heard of the Gage's eclectic charms, fewer realize how innovative its cuisine has become since the arrival of chef **Paul Petersen**. Along with chef de cuisine Juan Scott, Petersen serves what he likes to call “upscale down home” dishes, using quail from Diamond H Ranch in Bandera, venison from Broken Arrow Ranch in Fredericksburg and local delicacies from

many other Texas food producers. The Gage's own garden provides a bounty of vegetables, herbs and fruit as well.

The menu at the Gage Hotel's Café Cenizo changes seasonally, even weekly, to take advantage of the fresh vegetables and fruit coming out of the garden. A tomato-basil soup made from the last of the fall tomatoes was a welcome taste on a chilly November night. The next night, I tried a creamy roasted butternut squash soup, and found it the season's best. And whatever else you do, order the ancho chile glazed quail. (You can thank me later.)

Just around the corner from the Gage is **Eve's Garden**, an eclectic bed and breakfast its owners also refer to as an “Ecology Resource



Center.” Owner Clyde T. Curry created this rambling compound just about single-handedly, using papercrete, a building material composed of recycled paper fiber and Portland cement, augmented with straw bales and paper adobe. Inside, in a courtyard wild with arched ceilings and curved doorways, his partner, Kate Thayer, tends a vast year-round, almost-tropical organic garden. Its flowers find their way into fresh arrangements that end up in many of the area's upscale establishments, while veggies and herbs go directly to her kitchen, which serves healthy breakfasts made from locally produced food.

Each room at Eve's is a sort of small cottage unto itself, no two alike—most just a few yards from a pool made entirely from papercrete—possibly the only one in existence. Inside, the rooms are cool and wel-

coming, with round windows, Texas antiques, Mexican folk art, Indian tapestries and Native American rugs. The whole place is like an adobe spaceship commanded by Dr. Seuss that somehow landed in the West Texas desert.

Even if you don't stay at Eve's, make sure to drive by. It's an outstanding example of sustainable building. And what better place to spend an evening by the pool, sipping a glass of local wine?

Or try going to the source. **Luz de Estrella Winery**, three miles east of Marfa, produces eight wines, including a very good riesling and cabernet sauvignon from grapes in the Guadalupe and Davis Mountains. This small vineyard is currently growing cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, sauvignon blanc, viognier and gewürztraminer for future release.

Owner Linda Armstrong and winemaker Patrick Johnson like to host Friday night wine-tasting parties on their deck atop the Marfa plateau surrounded by the mountains, to view the famous Marfa mystery lights—an unearthly glow that appears in the night sky for reasons no one has yet determined.

A fall trip to Marathon will reveal many of its local flavors. You just need to know where to look.

*Gage Hotel, 101 Highway 90 W., Marathon
1-800-884-GAGE, gagehotel.com*

*Eve's Garden, Ave. C / N. 3rd St., Marathon
432-386-4165, evesgarden.org*

*Luz de Estrella Winery, 100 Starlight Way (E. Highway 90)
Marfa, 432-729-3434, luzdeestrella.com*