



WANT TO LIVE
 HILLSIDE,
 LAKESIDE OR
 SEASIDE? FIND
 YOUR PERFECT
 GETAWAY AMID
 THE VARIED
 TERRAIN
 OF TEXAS

BY HARVEY MARKS

The housing market may be cooling off, but not when it comes to second homes. In 2006, vacation property sales rose nearly 5 percent across the United States to a record 1.07 million, according to the National Association of Realtors (NAR). And there's no end in sight.

SUPER SECOND HOMES



TOP: Located on 30 acres near Terlingua and Big Bend National Park, Dos Corazones Ranch includes a 2,712-square-foot adobe main house and 1,487-square-foot second adobe with modern conveniences yet the feel of an old Chihuahuan hacienda. Photo courtesy Kuper/Sotheby's International Realty

LEFT: Towering pines and hardwoods cast a picture-perfect reflection in the clear aquifer-fed lake at The Retreat at Artesian Lakes, where there's always a great catch awaiting you.



LEFT: Welcome home to old Galveston at this 1900 Galveston Storm survivor with four parlors. Located in the East End Historical District, the four-bedroom beauty features a library overlooking a sunroom and deck and curly pine wainscoting throughout. Photo courtesy Karen Derr Realty

TOP LEFT: Take in an ocean view from your back porch at Beachtown, a new urbanist development designed by Duany Plater-Zyberk and Co. on the east end of Galveston Island. Beachtown is walkable, connected to nature and defined by a genuine town center. Photo courtesy Alice Donahue Real Estate

TOP RIGHT: Beautiful views and private access to the water make Clear Lake living a popular choice for second and getaway homes. Photo courtesy Re/Max Space Center

BELOW: The allure of homes along the channel continues in Key Allegro, a small island adjacent to Rockport and accessible by a bridge that crosses over the harbor filled with sailboats. Photo courtesy Alice Donahue Real Estate

Who's buying? In Houston, according to NAR, baby boomers make up the single largest group. They're followed by people in their 30s, often with children, who may be looking for both a vacation home and an investment opportunity. But regardless of whether buyers are sneaking up on retirement or focusing on a place to take the kids, they're fanning out across Texas to find that perfect place.

FROM THE WATER

"Galveston continues to hold its own, and the local housing market remains strong," says Karen Derr of Karen Derr Realty. She adds there's currently a good selection of inventory to choose from, whether it's beachside or bayside property, a loft in the Strand area or a high-rise condominium.

Dana Shinn and Alice Melott at Keller Williams Hidden Pearl Properties point to Galveston's relaxed lifestyle and diversity. "You can spend the day on the water, fishing or enjoying other outdoor recreational activities," they say. "When you get back, you have easy access to good restaurants and shopping, art galleries, theaters, concerts and a wide range of other cultural activities."

Clear Lake, located between Houston and Galveston with easy access to Galveston Bay, is another excellent choice. "It's a great family-oriented community," says Janice Owens at Re/Max Space Center. "Boating and yachting are a big part of the appeal, but other activities include a popular Celtic and Greek festival, car shows and free concerts."

She adds there is a great range of housing options, primarily focusing on single-family dwellings and town homes.





ABOVE: An inviting screen porch overlooks green pastures and historic live oaks at a Brenham home, formerly the Harrisburg and Hoddeville schools. Photo courtesy Kennedy Country Properties

LEFT: Life's as good as sweet iced tea in the Texas Hill Country at the Idea House and Farmstead in Fredericksburg. A project of The Progressive Farmer magazine, the house at 253 Kruse Hill Drive in Fredericksburg is open for public tours until Oct. 28 (closed Mondays and Tuesdays). For information, call 1.888.834.4046. Photo courtesy Rob Lagerstrom/The Progressive Farmer



ABOVE: Take a short walk through swaying prairie grass to the barn, part of the Idea House and Farmstead designed and built by The Progressive Farmer magazine in the Texas Hill Country town of Fredericksburg. Photo courtesy Rob Lagerstrom/The Progressive Farmer

People looking for a seaside getaway may want to consider Rockport and Port O'Connor, both close to Corpus Christi and about 3 1/2 hours from Houston. The two communities began as fishing villages, and they continue to have broad appeal for families and individuals interested in life on or by the water. The fishing is excellent with redfish, trout and flounder among the most common catches. The two communities also offer some of the very best birding areas in the United States, from ruby-throated hummingbirds to whooping cranes nesting in the nearby Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

Rockport and Port O'Connor are enjoying a building boom, and both offer a wide choice of housing options. "Prices in Port O'Connor range from \$60,000 for a basic fishing camp to \$2 million for a waterfront mansion," says Brenda Carter with Coldwell Banker/Russell Cain. She adds condominium and town home options start at around \$250,000.

TO THE HILLS

Not everyone wants to be on the coast. Another Texas is on proud display in the Hill Country, about half way between Houston and Austin. Communities like Brenham and Round Top in Fayette County and Bellville in Austin County offer picturesque links to the region's rural "Old West" heritage. Here, gardening and antiques are both popular pastimes, along with plenty of other family-friendly recreational activities, from hiking amid the wild flowers to splashing in the numerous lakes dotting the region.

Dixie Kennedy of Kennedy Country Properties suggests spending some time exploring. "There's a lot of history on display in the Hill Country, and every community has its own special flavor," she says. "Brenham is growing fast with a good deal of commercial development taking place. Round Top is justly famous for its antique shows and classical music festival. Bellville is one of the state's oldest settlements, and a lot of its history has been lovingly preserved in its town squares and quiet streets."





WAY OUT WEST

Marfa is another increasingly popular choice for a second home. This old ranching community located in the high desert of far West Texas is nestled between the Davis Mountains and Big Bend National Park, about 600 miles from Houston. It's a spectacular setting, offering sweeping vistas, historic architecture and a growing artists' colony. However, the area is perhaps known for the Marfa Lights, which can be viewed overhead on clear nights and appear to perform an intricate aerial ballet.

The town itself has fewer than 3,000 year-round residents, and many houses for sale here tend to be relatively old and small. A typical adobe house averaging less than 2,000 square feet could go for about \$250,000, but prices can vary widely.

Travel just a bit further and you reach the Big Bend area of southwest Texas, which gets its name from the vast curve the Rio Grande River makes as it crosses the region. The region is wildly beautiful and remote, including more than a million acres of public land in Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park. That makes it a perfect second-home setting for people who enjoy hiking, camping, river rafting and related activities.

Numerous small towns dot the region and prices depend largely on the proximity to recreation and major amenities. Your best bet is to focus on a specific area and take your time researching its housing market.

The reasons for choosing a second home are individual and ultimately highly personal. But as you look around Texas, you'll find any number of old favorites and "just-discovered" places where Houstonians are flocking for weekend getaways ... in their getaway homes.

ABOVE AND LEFT: *Carefully edited Southwest and Mexican accessories add just the right color and character to the bedroom of this reworked adobe home in Marfa. Smart minimalist design in the den makes for a serene, unfussy space. Photos courtesy Scott Lowden*



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ABOVE AND LEFT: *From the beamed ceiling to the wood-burning fireplace to the Italian ceramic tile floor, the den of the Dos Corazones Ranch house epitomizes relaxed and refined ranch life near Big Bend National Park. The impressive collection of antiques, art and furnishings are included in the purchase. A window frames one of the spectacular views. Photos courtesy Kuper/Sotheby's International Realty*

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