



Rancho Pillow
MOTEL

The Magic of Round Top

Our Home Editor hit the famous weeklong Round Top, Texas, antiques fair (with pen in hand) and discovered it was better than she'd ever imagined

BY ZOË GOWEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY WYNN MYERS

FIELD OF DREAMS
"Good junk always lives on," says Rancho Pillow owner Sheila Youngblood, who uses pieces found at Round Top to set her table for Feasts in the Field.

My idea of heaven on earth used to be the famous Paris flea markets,

but then I went to Texas—Round Top, Texas, to be precise. And while the French markets are spectacular, they are also far, far away. Not only did I return jet-lagged, but my treasures had to cross an ocean to get home.

As I've traveled the Southern circuit of antiques, furniture, and gift shows—from Nashville to High Point, North Carolina, to Atlanta—I've heard some whispers about what my Texas design friends have said for years: Round Top should not be missed.

Nine times out of ten, "Round Top" has been the response to questions like these: "Where did you get that perfectly worn-in but not-too-rustic farm table? How about your pine armoire with the bamboo detailing? And your kitchen island that was originally a German butcher block?"

My initial mental image of Round Top was a delightful but sleepy little flea market that's filled with pieces of collectible brown wood furniture. A quick Internet search revealed a bit more: It's a 50-year-old antiques-and-flea market extravaganza that pops up only twice a year in the farm fields lining a 20-mile stretch of State 237, roughly halfway between Austin and Houston. A deep scroll through Instagram clued me in to something else: There's a lot more to do there than just shop.

I made a call to Sheila Youngblood, the unofficial high priestess of Round Top and also the proprietor of Rancho

Pillow, an eclectic assemblage of guesthouses. She started coming to the antiques fair back in high school with her grandmother Nellie, who dyed her hair "Elvis black" and was partial to turquoise chiffon caftans. On their first trip there together, they filled a white Lincoln Continental so full that neither the trunk nor one of the doors would close.

"I tied the door with my belt and cut the strap off Nellie's handbag to get the trunk down. This year, to haul everything back home to Austin, I tied down the hatch of my SUV with a dog leash and an iPhone cable," says Youngblood. "Unpacking the car is about as much fun as loading it. You never remember everything you've bought at the fair," she adds.

Along with cell phones and Wi-Fi, there's also a lot more diversity in Round Top now, from live music and new restaurants to inspired lodging and serious makers and collectors selling their wares. "Smart people are transforming this little town into a true destination," says Youngblood, "but the old essence of it is still here."

Soon after our call, I booked a flight to Houston, rented a zippy Volkswagen Tiguan, and spent 72 Topo Chico-fueled hours living the big Texas life in Round Top. It was such a good time that I've shared my itinerary here (along with a few tips for first-time visitors). To do it right, you need a plan.

DAY 1: Shop the Fields

On the first day of your trip, put your energy into browsing the fields along State 237. Picture a tailgate-style setup of pop-up tents crowding a country pasture. You will need patience and stamina, but this is where you'll find the best bargains. According to several locals who are in the know, the higher-end Marburger Farm Antique Show dealers shop here early and mark up the prices for resale in their booths. Youngblood tipped me off: Forget walking. Drive through the fields, and stop if something catches your eye. One of my particular favorites was the **Bar W Field**, covered with old doors, windows, and shutters. Don't stay too long in one field, or you'll risk premature shopper's burnout.

Take a break for a long lunch at **The Garden Co.—Feed and Firewater**. Set in a 1914 farmhouse that was moved to the recently redone Rummel Square, the cafe serves big-city, ladies-who-lunch salads and sandwiches (and wine if the fields left you feeling taxed). Reservations are suggested.

Next, head back down State 237 to **Ex-cess 1 and 2**, a pair of fields located across the highway from each other. Ex-cess 1 is loaded with vintage and antique furniture, with many dealers selling old signs, lighting, and sets of chairs. Pop into **Things A.T. Roche's** to peruse their vintage textiles, and stop next door to see fancy European pieces at **The Belgian's Antiques**. My top Ex-cess 1 vendor is **KB Design, Inc.**, where Kim and Ken Bizzell specialize in metal salvage repurposed as chairs, sofas, and home accessories, such as lighting. This company has an industrial Belgian vibe that distinguishes it from the other vendors, and everything is arranged so you can picture how to incorporate the pieces into your home.

Move across the street to meander the stalls of Ex-cess 2. While there are plenty of spots to explore, the real star



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Visiting the Marburger Farm Antique Show is like touring the world's best shops in one stop. Husband-and-wife team Nick Mosley and Ryann Ford bring their dogs to work at Townsend Provisions. Scout out vintage silver pieces for your table. Nomadic Trading Co. offers options galore.



“I consider this one of the greatest places on earth.”

—SHEILA YOUNGBLOOD



SCORE BIG

Giant finds like this Texas sign at Marburger Farm Antique Show bring in thousands of buyers to each fair.

here is the North Carolina-based **Nomadic Trading Co.** Be sure to stop and chat with husband-and-wife duo Timur and Lineke Williford. They sell imported Turkish carpets in elegant monochromatic shades, along with vintage chairs and delicately restored, in-demand industrial lighting fixtures. It's rumored that large retailers (you know the ones) buy unique pieces from them to serve as models for their reproductions. (Yes, I also bought one.)

Looking to add some bohemian flair to your home? Make your way across a small aisle to **Knock on Wood**, which is stocked with those colorful Peruvian textiles and Moroccan rugs that populate the houseplant-draped abode of your favorite Instagrammer.

Hop back in the car, and venture to **Sandy Schor & Co.'s** Warrenton, Texas, retail store. It's the only house on the highway that's covered with turquoise-and-silver jewelry. The family business, which is owned by Sandy and Lea Ann Schor, started in 1979, and it now also employs the couple's two daughters as well as a son-in-law. If you've been eyeing a silver-and-turquoise cuff or a squash blossom necklace, I suggest biting the bullet here. You can't beat the prices or variety. Take the time to dig through the small bins on the porch to find the best ones.

Once you're loaded down with good deals and dirty from a long day spent in the fields, finish the evening with queso and margaritas at **Mandito's** (it's located in the former Los Patrones building). This newly opened Round Top outpost is from Houston restaurateur Armando Palacios.

DAY 2:

Browse Indoors & Feast Outside

Take a more comfortable route today and check out all the new happenings, many of which are projects by young Houston-born developer Mark Massey.

LIVING THE LIFE

Carina and Doug Jenkins spend their summers hunting for treasures in Europe.



"I've been visiting my grandparents here for 37 years, and I just couldn't shake the idea of restoring the town's historic buildings to make this place a year-round destination," he says.

Case in point: **The Compound**, which looks like a handsome stable from the street. Step inside, and you'll immediately notice the refreshing air-conditioning. (The Compound also has the best restrooms in Round Top.) First, head to **The Carriage House** to check out **Eneby Home**, owned by Nashville-based couple Carina and Doug Jenkins. They specialize in European antiques, most notably Swedish and Danish. "We spend our summers in Europe carefully

handpicking everything we purchase," Doug says. "We only sell pieces that we could live with ourselves." It's a softer, less polarizing take on mid-century modern. The prices are high but fair. You won't find their offerings anywhere else.

Next, move over to **The Stables** to browse **Manos de Sur** (which imports colorful South American textiles) and **Old World Antieks** (with its enormous array of formal pieces sourced from 13 countries). Take a spin by the food trucks parked in the courtyard, and be sure to scope out The Compound's programming. Massey and his team have been inviting some of the top



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

1 TIMING

Round Top revolves around two principal shows: the Big Red Barn (October 1 through 6) and Marburger Farm (October 2 through 6). This fall is the first time the two are syncing their show dates. Go early to check out the fields on September 30, and save Marburger's opening day for the end of your trip.

2 TRAVELING

The town of Round Top is about halfway between Houston and Austin. The most economical option for long-distance visitors is to fly into Houston and rent a car. (You'll need one to get around and haul your goods!) Helpful trip-planning sites are antiqueweekend.com, showdaily.us, and roundtop.com.

3 PACKING

Round Top is hot and dusty. Wear comfortable clothing and closed-toe shoes. It's Texas, so cowboy boots or booties are the way to go. Use a big tote to carry things like hand sanitizer and bottled water. While most places accept credit cards, you can negotiate better prices with cash.

designers in the country for panels and seminars. This fall, look out for Susan Ferrier, Jeffrey Billhuber, Thom Filicia, and Michelle Nussbaumer.

Once you pull yourself away from The Compound, head toward Rummel Square for **Townsend Provisions**. It's located in a 1920s farmhouse and run by Nick Mosley and his wife, photographer Ryann Ford, with the help of both of their antiques-expert mothers. "Nick's mom, Linda, was a vintage-boot dealer," says Ford. "My mom is a buyer in Wisconsin. This big spot was available, so we took a leap and opened here, selling our mix of goods."

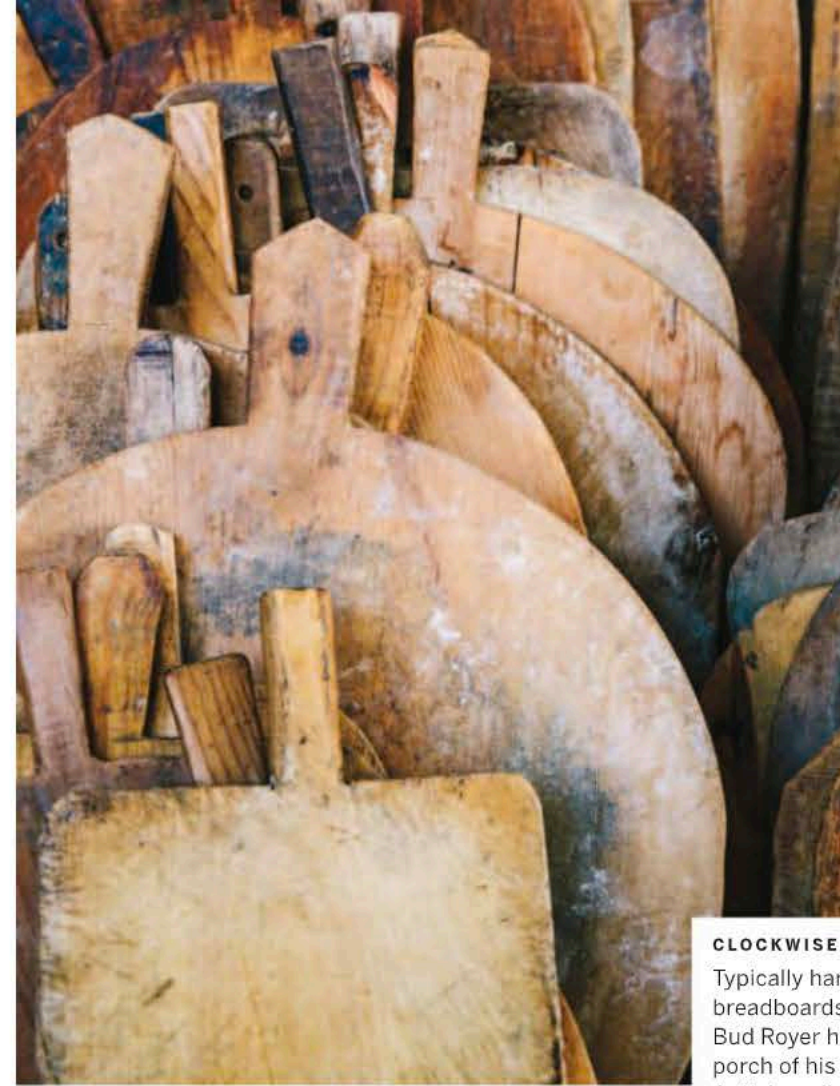
Go immediately to the boot room to browse over 400 pairs of pristine vintage cowboy boots lined up floor to ceiling. Even if shoes aren't your thing, this is the most Instagrammable shot at Round Top. Upstairs, Mosley has a large selection of vintage holiday decor. Take a quick look at a couple of nearby dealers like **Bad Hombres** and **Susan Horne Antiques** before having lunch at **Royers Round Top Café**. If you don't meet the flamboyant owner, Bud Royer (who's decked out in turquoise from Sandy Schor & Co. and is known locally as "the Pieman"), then you have not earned your Round Top stripes. I highly recommend starting off (rather than finishing) your lunch with a piece of their world-famous pie. Do as they advise, and "Remember the Alamo." If you're there on a Sunday and still have enough room for protein, order their legendary fried chicken, which soaks in a 24-hour marinade of buttermilk and flavorful spices. While this cafe isn't the place for calorie counting, it is a spot for making a reservation. Call ahead, and JB, Bud's son, will hold a table for you.

Work off lunch by walking through the itsy-bitsy downtown, and look out for the **Round Top Rifle Hall**, where Emma Lee Turney hosted the original antiques show that grew into what the Round Top antiques fair is today. End your tour with a long ramble through

Barbara Samuelson and Russell Smith's **Lark**, one block from State 237. You won't believe the pieces of wonderfully preserved vintage barware, the wide selection of little-known candles and perfumes, or (my favorite) Smith's line of nature-inspired fine jewelry.

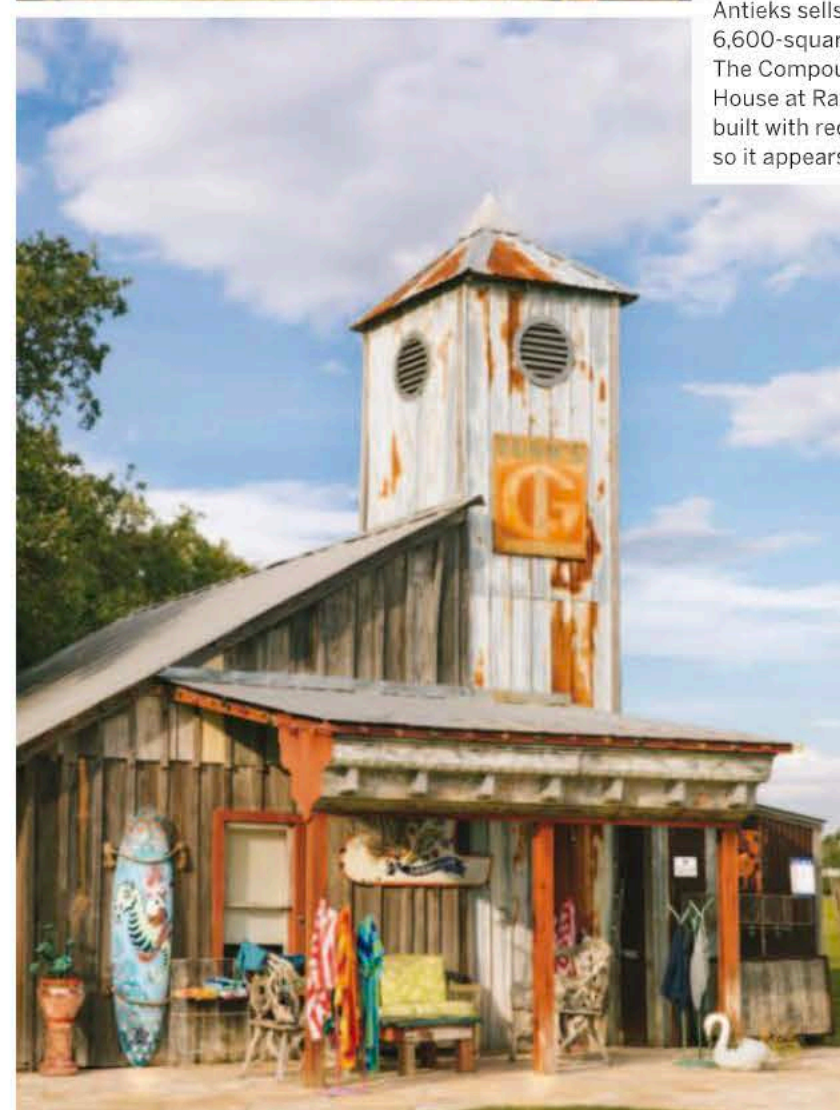
Take a quick drive to Matt White's mega architectural salvage business, **Recycling The Past**. It's marked by an old airplane parked outside. White has been in the biz since he was 12 years old and can source just about anything. What's his proudest collaboration? A late 1920s Bonneville race car for a Ralph Lauren shoot. "My friend and I dismantled it to get it up the elevator of their Manhattan offices, and then we put the whole thing back together," he says. Go back inside the store to see a marvelous array of their "Second Hand Interesting Things" (we'll leave it to you to work out White's acronym). "We've got a little bit of everything here," he says, "from architecture to chesterfield sofas."

Next, it's time for dinner—definitely a big highlight of the trip. Twice during each antiques fair, Youngblood opens the gate to her otherworldly, wildly colorful wonderland at **Rancho Pillow** and hosts **Feasts in the Field**. Besides bringing in chefs from nearby foodie towns like Austin and New Orleans, she also sets up her **Rancho Mercado** (stocked with handmade goods like jewelry, blankets, caftans, and bags that are collected from far-flung places). The items are pricey, but you'll want something to remember this experience by. Gathered around a 150-foot-long assemblage of tables are vendors you probably met that day (some she even lets sleep in her field), along with big-name buyers, glitzy designers, and Round Top old-timers. It's like living out a magical realism scene in the Texas countryside. Youngblood regards it as "celebrating a creative little country paradise." Try to arrive before sundown, because you'll want to absorb every single thing.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Typically hard to find, old breadboards abound here. Bud Royer holds court on the porch of his cafe. Old World Antieks sells fine pieces in a 6,600-square-foot space at The Compound. The Tower House at Rancho Pillow was built with reclaimed materials so it appears old and quirky.





THE RINGMASTER
Sheila Youngblood stands on the porch of The Red House, formerly her private home but now open to visitors.

DAY 3:
Head to Marburger Farm Antique Show

And now for the big, fancy shopping: the opening day of the **Marburger Farm Antique Show**, featuring over 350 world-class dealers arranged in 9 large tents and 11 buildings. Purchase your \$25 ticket in advance, and arrive there at least 30 minutes before the gate opens at 10 a.m. to get in line to shop. Once the tape is cut, shoppers actually start running inside. (This is a prime people-watching moment.) They have stands for food and drinks so you can power shop through lunch.

After Marburger, venture to **Arbor International Antiques & Interior Design Show**. The name is somewhat misleading, but the real draw here is a shopper's direct access to importers and artists who'll let you buy items at wholesale prices. Browse Heather and Jason Rosfeld's **Heja Home**, specializing in Moroccan rugs, pillows, and textiles. Swing by to meet **Richard Schmidt**, a Southwestern jewelry designer and hatmaker, and then make a beeline to artist **Paul Meyer**, who incorporates Schmidt's actual works into his own paintings. Then visit with **Pandora de Balthazar** and see her fine bed linens. She will insist that you try out her sleep system by getting into a bed—no matter how dusty you are.

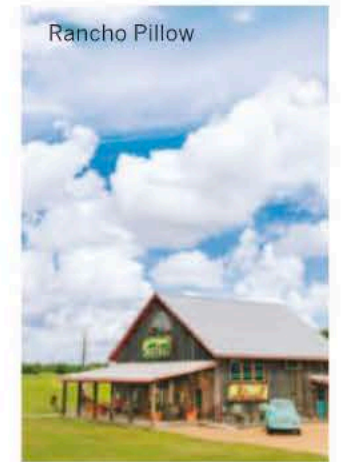
For the last stop of the day, head across the street to **Market Hill**. This newly expanded, airy pavilion has 119,000 square feet of easy-to-navigate vendors and a gourmet cafe. Start your tour at Jessica Fairbrother's **Sacred Heart Antiques** to check out all her French finds, and meander back to Ender Tasci's eclectic **Elephant Walk Interiors & Antiques**. Pick through the selection of wares at mega-importer **Bobo Intriguing Objects**, and then finish off with a loop through the **Paul Michael Company**. Enjoy a quiet drink and light dinner at **Prost on Block 29** before calling the trip a success. **SL**

WHERE TO STAY

You're here for the antiques, so pick a place that keeps you motivated to buy by design. Book early!



The Vintage Round Top



Rancho Pillow

pieces. If you aren't sure what to do with your finds from the shows, let the Hulls' decor inform you. thevintageroundtop.com

3
Rancho Pillow

Youngblood opened her personal 20-acre guesthouse compound in 2016 and soon began hosting her Feasts in the Field. You can book a single house or the entire property for your group. There's no place like it—and no hostess quite like Youngblood. ranchopillow.com

1
Flophouze Hotel

Matt White, owner of Recycling The Past, put his inventive knack for salvage to good use. Situated next door to his warehouse, six shipping containers have been converted into luxurious little hotel rooms that can accommodate from three to six guests. Each one provides a bathroom, kitchenette, and private deck that looks out over (what else?) cow pastures. flophouze.com

2
The Vintage Round Top

Fans of Joanna and Chip Gaines should consider booking a

stay in one of these charming fixer-uppers, owned by Paige and Smoot Hull. They have redone two adjacent cottages (which can be rented separately) and decorated them in an enviable mix of modern, vintage, and industrial



Flophouze Hotel