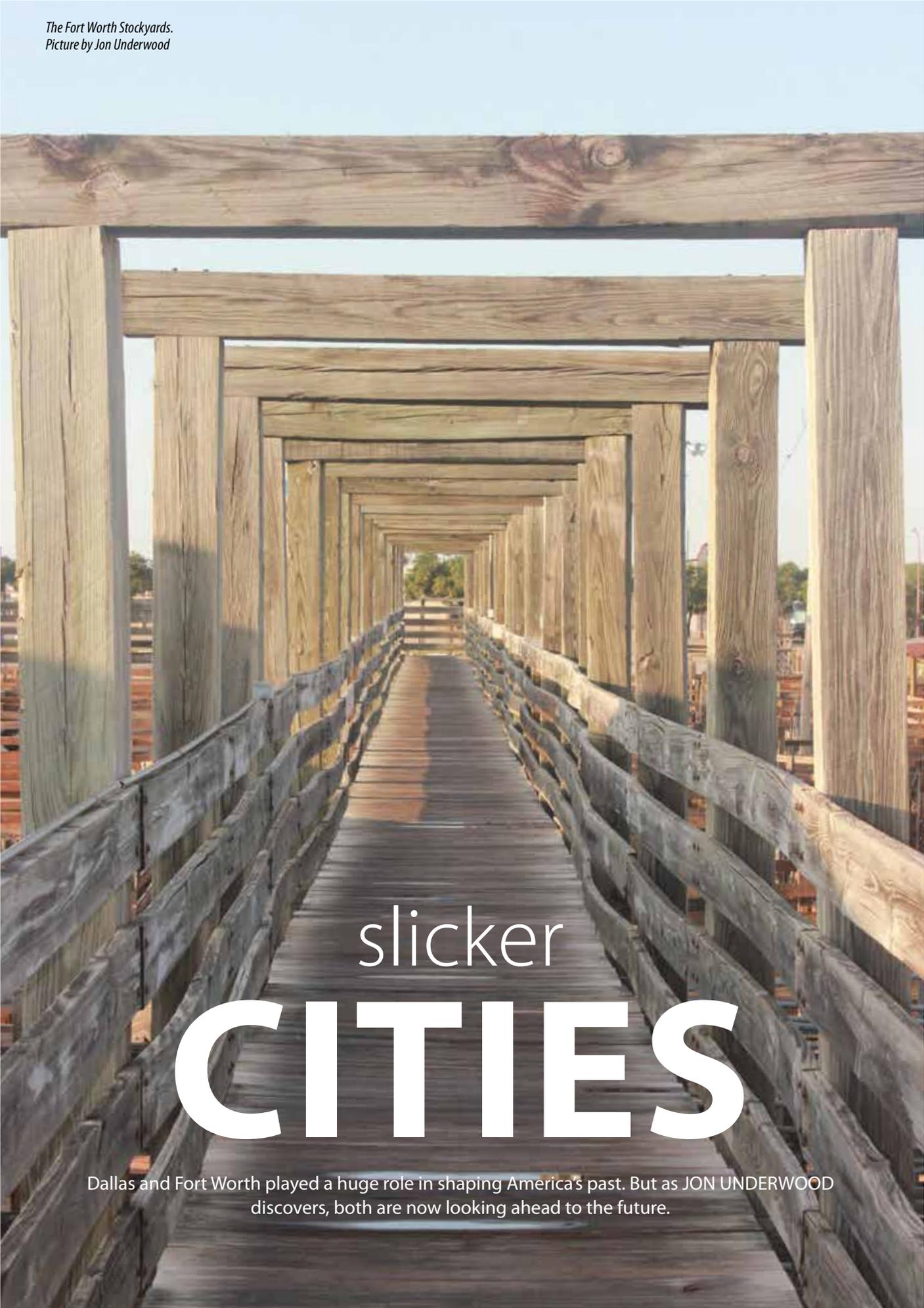


*The Fort Worth Stockyards.
Picture by Jon Underwood*



slicker
CITIES

Dallas and Fort Worth played a huge role in shaping America's past. But as JON UNDERWOOD discovers, both are now looking ahead to the future.



Ride 'em cowboy at the
Cowtown Coliseum



The Dallas skyline

SHOP TILL YOU DROP

While the culture, dining and entertainment in Dallas and Fort Worth is delightful, perhaps the best reason to come to this part of Texas is the shopping. The exchange rate still offers travelling Aussies the chance to shop big with prices much cheaper in America for a wide variety of brands, including make-up, clothing and shoes. Those looking for authentic cowboy gear should head to Wild Bill's Western Store in Dallas or M.L. Leddy's in Fort Worth. Both offer boots, clothing, belts, buckles and much more. Just outside Fort Worth is the Grand Prairie Premium Outlet mall where Calvin Klein, Nike, Gap, Tommy Hilfiger and a range of stores can be found. In Dallas, the NorthPark Center was America's first indoor, climate-controlled mall and again the choice is varied and affordable. A couple of hours spent shopping in either city will probably save you enough money to afford another holiday next year!

A JAPANESE tourist is standing in the middle of the road, seemingly oblivious to the threat of oncoming traffic. He smiles as his girlfriend takes his picture from the safety of the pavement. Suddenly, a car horn blares and he sprints to the kerb with barely seconds to spare.

Watching this drama unfold, I'm prepared to dismiss it as just a simple act of pedestrian stupidity. Yet this strange game of vehicular chicken is repeated by others over the next 10 minutes. It's only when I spot the simple white X painted on the road and on which they have all been risking life and limb to stand do I understand the significance.

This is Main Street in Dallas and the cross marks the spot where one of the bullets struck John Fitzgerald Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Countless books, movies and theories have been produced about the assassination but no matter what your take on those tragic events, to stand there and imagine the scene as JFK drove down that street is haunting.

You can't help but look up to that sixth floor window of the former Texas School Book Depository and pontificate on angle, range and wind speed. To me, the X's on the road (there's a white one and a yellow one) are a little ghoulish but it's clear the tourists think otherwise.

While Dallas will forever be remembered as being the scene of the crime, the city refuses to be defined by it. Sure, they commemorate the life and death of JFK with walking tours and memorials, while the excellent Sixth Floor Museum housed in the very building where Lee Harvey Oswald is 'alleged' to have fired the fatal shots puts the events of 51 years ago into context.

But the city is more than an eternal shrine to a fallen hero. Bold development plans are rejuvenating Dallas in a bid to get more people to move back into the city centre. The CBD is surprisingly small – more akin to Brisbane – but now it has a funky new arts district spanning 19 blocks, the largest urban facility of its kind in America.

Here, you'll find the Dallas Museum of Art, the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Dee and Charles Wylie Theatre and the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House, all within walking distance of each other. Even the buildings are remarkable, with four designed by Pritzker-prize winning architects.

A more recent addition to the city's educational establishments is the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. The former President and his First Lady took a very personal interest in the creation of this state-of-the-art facility and the results are impressive. The section devoted



to the 9/11 attack is particularly emotional with pictures, exhibits and official documents from the time showing how President Bush coped with the unfolding drama.

But Dallas offers food for the body as well as the mind. The restaurant scene is buzzing with top-line chefs blending local cuisine with dishes from around the world. Author, philanthropist chef and owner, Stephan Pyles, is doing amazing things at his Stampede 66 restaurant (including canning his own chilli) which boasts the best 'True Texas' dining experience in the city, but no matter where you eat, you'll never go hungry in Dallas!

visitdallas.com

FORT WORTH

Lying on my hotel bed, I can hear the distinctive sound of a train whistle somewhere in the distance. It evokes thoughts of the steam locomotives that brought pioneers to this part of Texas and on to new frontiers in the west. It was the era of the horse, the gun and the cowboy.

Fortunately, there are still places where this part of America's history is celebrated and preserved. Just outside this vibrant and developing modern city are the Fort Worth Stockyards, where cowboys and cowgirls still roam the streets, there's a cattle drive twice a day down the main street and the heady aroma of straw, beast and dung hangs in the air.

The buildings are old and authentic, the stores all sell western gear and there's a rodeo in the Cowtown Coliseum every Friday and Saturday night. You can also try line-dancing at Billy Bob's Texas, the world's largest honky tonk, which is so big it has its own bull-riding arena.

I met a direct descendant of famed gambler and Wyatt Earp amigo Doc Holliday during my visit and as I listened to his stories, found myself transported back to a world where life was cheap and often

ugly. Yet all of this is no faux culture show just for tourists: this is a way of keeping an important and integral part of America's history alive and I just loved it.

While the Stockyards are all about Fort Worth's past, the future is developing right in front of the city's boot-scootin' eyes. The multi-million dollar redevelopment of Sundance Square has rejuvenated the heart of the city, offering a plethora of restaurants, shops and entertainment.

When we visited, kids were splashing in and out of specially-designed water spouts and the whole area was buzzing with vitality and happy faces, a far cry from the days when it was called 'Hell's Half Acre' and was a haunt for notorious outlaws like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

They also take their culture pretty seriously around these here parts, too, hence the marketing slogan currently being used to promote Fort Worth: 'City of Cowboys and Culture'. The latter part of the equation comes from the cultural district, where an impressive collection of impressive collections is housed.

The Kimbell Art Museum, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth are all located here, providing a cultural nirvana for lovers of painting, sculpture and the like. Gourmands also have reason to visit the Modern Art Museum as it houses the Cafe Modern, one of the best places to chow down in the city, although there are many fine restaurants to choose from, including Ellerbe Fine Foods and Reata (check out the view from the roof).

Fort Worth is an intriguing and absorbing mix of the old and the new, offering something for everybody and a lot in between. The people are universally friendly and with ambitious plans for the city's future, there's no doubt y'all should mosey on down and check it out.

fortworth.com; 360ftworth.com



FAST FACTS ///

GETTING THERE: Qantas is operating an A380 service six times per week (every day except Tuesdays) direct from Sydney to Dallas-Fort Worth. qantas.com.au

WHERE TO STAY: Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas offers 143 elegantly furnished rooms and suites. It has a stylish bar, contemporary restaurant and terrace, fitness centre and pool. rosewoodhotels.com
The Omni Hotel in Fort Worth has a variety of well-appointed guest rooms and suites. Situated in the cultural centre, it has a fitness centre, spa, pool, restaurants, the Whiskey & Rye sports bar and Wine Thief wine bar. omnihotels.com

WHAT TO DO: The Sixth Floor Museum. jfk.org
The Dallas Arts District. thedallasartsdistrict.org
George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu
Stampede 66. stampede66.com
Fort Worth Stockyards. fortworthstockyards.org
Fort Worth Cultural District. fwculture.com
Ellerbe Fine Foods. ellerbefinefoods.com
Reata. reata.net



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FOR FOR THE WHEEL HORSE



1 CHANCE TO SAY "TIPPECANOE"



HOWL AT THE WOLF



CHUCKLE WITH DANCING



WANT TO BE A COWBOY?



WANT TO BE A COWBOY?



WANT TO BE A COWBOY?



WANT TO BE A COWBOY?



WANT TO BE A COWBOY?



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