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## SITES

BY BETSY BAIR



Photo Courtesy of Dallas CIB

Photo Courtesy of West Austin/Anja Schneider  
Left: A revitalization of the downtown Dallas Farmers Market is under way; above: an Austin guitarist

# SPOTLIGHT ON TEXAS

**Texas is known** for its size, cowboy culture, great climate, and—more and more often—its hip factor. No wonder four of its cities—Dallas, Austin, Houston, and San Antonio—were among the top 25 U.S. destinations for medical meetings in a recent survey of medical meeting planners by MeetingsNet. ([See the full survey report here.](#))

In April, Dallas took a long stride forward in its mass transit plan when streetcar travel between downtown's Union Station and Oak Cliff's Methodist Dallas Medical Center came back after a nearly 50-year absence, with state-of-the-art electric vehicles. This marked the first phase of Dallas' modern streetcar system.

Also this year, the Texas Horse Park, located

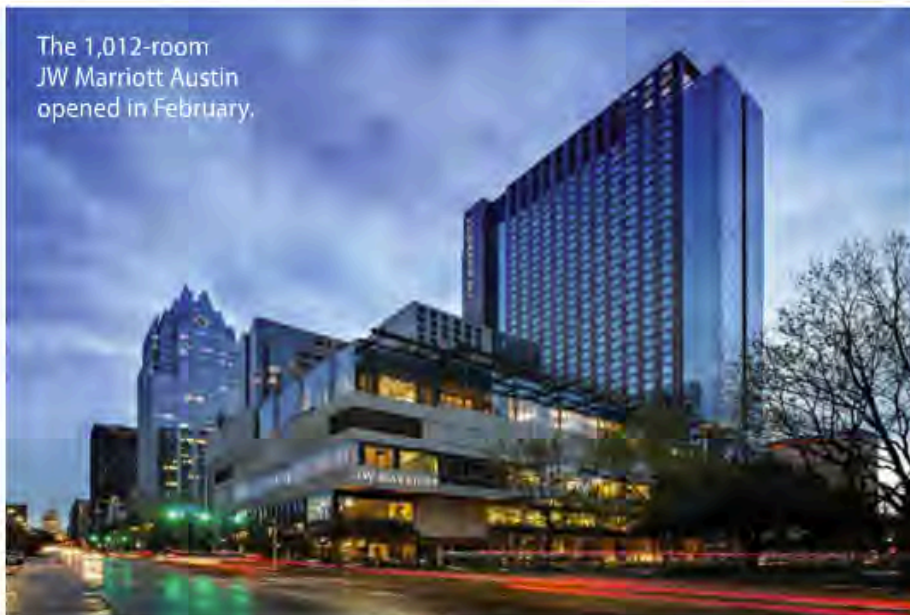
adjacent to the 6,000-acre Great Trinity Forest, opened in March only eight miles from downtown Dallas. The facility provides outdoor recreation options, hosts national and international equestrian competitions, and offers a new venue for corporate events and private parties.

The revitalization of the downtown Dallas Farmers Market is under way, to be complete by the end of next year, and includes \$65 million in redevelopment and new construction. Plans call for space for new vendors, a bandshell for entertainment, a beer garden, and retail space.

There's a lot going on in the hotel and convention scene, too, especially in the booming state capital of Austin.

# HOTEL AND VENUE NEWS

Many properties are getting a facelift.



The 1,012-room JW Marriott Austin opened in February.

**Austin** HOTELS ARE POPPING up in the state capital, well known for its live music scene and the annual hosting of South by Southwest. The **JW Marriott Austin** opened in February with 1,012 guest rooms and 120,000 square feet of meeting space, including several outdoor venues and six dining options. The property has achieved its LEED Silver certification and two-star Austin Energy Green Building rating. It can accommodate receptions for up to 3,000 in its 30,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom. In addition, groups can choose among 42 meeting rooms and a 23,000-square-foot exhibit hall, all within two blocks of the 370,000-square-foot Austin Convention Center. And with Austin a hub of tech entrepreneurship, the hotel has ramped up its connectivity with IGB of Internet bandwidth. The JW Marriott is part of Marriott's Convention & Resort Network, an integrated network of more than 60 JW Marriott, Autograph Collection, Renaissance, Marriott, and Gaylord Hotels and Resorts properties.

The **Westin Austin Downtown** is scheduled to open this month, just one block from the Austin Convention Center and 6th Street, the historic street and entertainment district. The hotel has 366 guest rooms and suites, including WestinWORKOUT Rooms, as well as a 24-hour WestinWORKOUT

Fitness Studio, 19,000 square feet of event space, and a rooftop pool.

The **Hotel Van Zandt**, a Kimpton hotel in the popular Rainey Street district, will open this fall. The hotel will offer 319 guest rooms and 41 suites, along with 12,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space that can accommodate up to 500 guests. Hotel Van Zandt's designer Mark Zeff aims to capture the essence of local culture and combine it with Texas' history of elegance while maintaining Austin's hip element. The hotel's name is loosely drawn from its historic Texas muse, Isaac Van Zandt, the Republic of Texas Ambassador to the U.S., as well as his third great-grandson, Townes Van Zandt, who left his mark on Texas music history with songs that have inspired a generation of musicians.

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In Dallas, The Statler Hotel & Residences gets a new life.

## Dallas

**DOWNTOWN DALLAS' HISTORIC** and iconic **Dallas Statler** hotel that blossomed in the 1950s and 1960s, will soon be flying the Hilton flag again. Centurion American Development and Hilton Worldwide announced in April that Hilton has signed a franchise license agreement to open a new luxury hotel in the building after it is converted into a mixed-use project. The 19-story Commerce Street landmark has been empty for more than a decade. It opened as a Hilton hotel but operated in later years as the Dallas Grand. The renovated building will be called The Statler Hotel & Residences and will offer 161 hotel rooms as well as meeting space. Hilton will market the hotel portion of the project when it's finished as part of Curio—A Collection by Hilton, a new chain of luxury hotels. The Highland Dallas, Curio Collection by Hilton, opened last August.

At the **Omni Dallas Hotel**, a new \$27 million retail and parking structure has opened, which adds 15,000 square feet of retail space and four

new restaurants, including Tex-Mex, sushi, pizza and wine bar, and beer garden concepts—all with patio space for customers to dine fronting Lamar Street. The Omni Dallas Hotel is a 23-story, 1,001-room hotel in the heart of downtown. Owned by the City of Dallas, the hotel is attached directly to the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas.

**Virgin Hotels** will open its fourth U.S. location in the Dallas Design District in 2018. It will feature 200 guest rooms, a spa, pool, and multiple dining establishments.

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Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport has upgraded.

## Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex

**THE 506-ROOM Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport** in Irving revealed a renovation last August, including \$1.6 million in meeting space renovations, upgrading the property's 10,000-square-foot ballroom, 3,000-square-foot junior ballroom, multiple breakout rooms, amphitheater, and pre-function space. From light fixtures, wall vinyl, woodwork, and chairs to the new color schemes and artwork, every inch of the redesigned space reveals a modern, clean look. Free shuttle service to and from DFW Airport is available for hotel guests. In addition, Dallas Area Rapid Transit's (DART) Orange Line expansion, which also opened last August, links the country's longest light-rail system to the world's third-busiest airport and marks DFW as the third-largest American airport with a direct rail connection to the city center.

The Dallas Cowboys and Omni Hotels & Resorts are partnering on a new hotel, the **Omni Frisco Hotel**, at the future site of the Cowboys World Headquarters in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. The 300-room Omni property will be one of the only full-service upscale hotels in the area, and serve as a cornerstone of the mixed-use development, which will be anchored by the Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters and Frisco's 12,000-seat multi-use event center. The publicly owned center will be used by the City of Frisco and its school district to host various activities including athletic competitions and other special events. The Dallas Cowboys will also use the event center as its training facility. The hotel is scheduled to open in early 2017.

The new **Sheraton McKinney Hotel** opened in Dallas in April. The \$38 million project represents McKinney's first upscale, full-service hotel and features 187 guest rooms and 10 suites, and is connected to a 20,000-square-foot event center with a 7,630-square-foot ballroom.

The Allen City Council has approved a development agreement with TCH Altera LLC for the construction of **The Convention Center at Watters Creek**, an \$85 million, full-service, four-star facility. The convention hotel will have 290 guest rooms, a 64,200-square-foot convention center, and a 1,000-car parking garage, adjacent to Allen's Watters Creek mixed-use center. Projected to open in January 2017, the center will offer the largest convention and exhibition space in the north Dallas suburbs.

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### Houston

→ **OPENING SEPTEMBER 2016**, the **Marriott Marquis Houston** will be located in the heart of downtown, connected via skybridge to the George R. Brown Convention Center. This addition to the Marquis portfolio, and Marriott's Convention & Resort Network, will feature 1,000 guest rooms and more than 100,000 square feet of meeting space, including Houston's largest ballroom. Also planned: a Texas-shaped lazy river and infinity pool, special events pavilion, full-service spa and fitness center, two-story sports bar, two specialty restaurants, wine bar, cafe, and pool bar and grill.

Opened first in 1924 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, **The Sam Houston Hotel** underwent an extensive renovation, and has rebranded as The Sam Houston, Curio Collection by Hilton. The downtown location is convenient to Houston's Theater District, major companies, sports and entertainment venues, urban parks, and shopping and dining options. The 100-room property offers meeting space for up to 175 people, including the sleek Mockingbird Board Room.