

Keys to the city

Four concierges share ideas about Austin's best hangouts.

By **Melanie Spencer**
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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You are flying to a city far from home and need someone to schedule a grooming session for your Bengal tiger: No sweat.

Your wedding is about to begin, the pianist is a no show and you need a replacement five minutes ago: Problem solved.

You have to find a giant gift bow for the Miata you are presenting to your daughter for her sweet 16 party: Easily accomplished.

These are just a few of the tasks fulfilled without a second thought by four of Austin's certified concierges.

Whether you need something as routine as a dinner reservation or something as seemingly random as three donkeys for your house in California, these concierges accept the challenge with zeal: Steven Leigh, chef concierge at the 5 Fifty Five condos atop the downtown Hilton; and chef concierge Lorley Musiol and concierges Tommy Dean and Steven Beasley, of the Four Seasons.



Ricardo B. Brazziell
AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Lorley Musiol



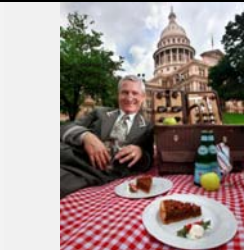
Andrew Loehman
FOR AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Steven Leigh



Ricardo B. Brazziell
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Steven Beasley



Ricardo B. Brazziell
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Tommy Dean

Each one is a career concierge and member of the prestigious international organization, Les Clefs d'Or (keys of gold in French and pronounced lay-clay-door). You can rest assured that when you approach a concierge with crossed keys on their lapels, it is both their passion and their life's work to accommodate every request (as long as it is legal, moral and humanly possible).

Leigh sums it up simply: "Our job is not to ask why, it's just to do."

So, who better to ask about the best of what Austin has to offer than those who have the keys to the city? If you are summering in Austin this season (or even if you already live here), check out some of the favorite hangouts of these consummate concierges.

Lorley Musiol, Four Seasons

Age: 53
Years as a concierge: 24
Hails from: New Jersey
Years in Austin: 1

Favorite thing, above all else, to do in Austin: To go walking with my two dogs (Harley and Coco) and discover all of the parks and greenery. Moving from Las Vegas, I love to get out in nature with my two rescue dogs, and Austin is just perfect for that — from the Hill Country to Town Lake.

Live music must: I'm a jazz buff and One World Theatre, for me, is the best place to hear jazz. It is a small setting — less than 300 people — and you feel like you are in your living room. There is not a bad seat. It's a beautiful Tuscan building. I went to see the Rippingtons there, and it was beyond fabulous.

Barbecue joint: Right now, my husband (Rudy) and I, every Sunday, are hitting every barbecue place that was in the Austin American-Statesman guide. We've been to Llano, Lockhart and Elgin, but I don't have a favorite yet. The survey isn't done.

Tex-Mex heaven: Z Tejas on West Sixth Street.

Natural setting: Mount Bonnell. I like that and I like to get in a boat and go down Town Lake — in a little pontoon boat — and look at the houses and hillside, nature and foliage.

Breakfast place: I'm going to have to say Las Manitas. The women that run the business are so warm and friendly and stop to talk every time I'm in there. I just love the local feel, the casualness and the food. It's a great place to center myself. And, I hear great stories from table to table, but the two women that run it, they have the best stories of all.

Dinner with friends: Dinner is my big thing. I'm going to have to say Ill Forks right now. The service is so welcoming, not rushed, they make me feel special when I'm there. It's simple, American food. It's a place I go to have good food and good conversation. The staff is friendly and they remember your name. I like to get recognition because I give recognition all day. And, they have good music in the bar.

Romantic dinner: Hudson's on the Bend. It's remote. I love the little house. I love the twinkling patio lights. Unusual cuisine. Great wine selection. It's romantically set for me.

Place to see art: Kathy Womack Gallery, because Kathy Womack uses vibrant, beautiful colors and unusual artistry.

Place to see a movie: The Alamo Drafthouse downtown (since closed on Colorado Street for a move to East Sixth Street, expected to open in September). It's rare. Accessibility, culture, the people who own it. Sometimes they do more offbeat showings than anywhere else.

Retail therapy: Now, the Domain, because Louis Vuitton and Tiffany have come to Austin. I love the feel of the residential with the retail, the town feel and the great restaurants.

Cocktail hour: The Four Seasons. This lobby bar has some creative cocktails. I've tried everything from the Batini to the Valentini.

Place people should know about: Mandola Winery in Driftwood. This fall, Mandola will be adding a restaurant next to the winery.

Steven Leigh, 5 Fifty Five

Age: 40

Years as a concierge: 20

Hails from: San Antonio

Years in Austin: 7

Favorite thing, above all else, to do in Austin: Going out to dinner. I am a major foodie and love to offer my personal recommendations to people when asked. When I find out they are a foodie, it thrills me to speak about certain places I love. Some guests have asked if I get a commission because I'm excited when speaking about these places. In one case, I offered to pay for my guest's meal if they didn't like my recommendation. They were from the East Coast and didn't want to eat seafood here. I did not have to pay.

Coffee break: Starbucks in the Arboretum is a great place to sit inside or out and relax with a book or computer in a nice, bucolic setting.

Live music must: I'm not a huge fan of live music, but when I do go, I go to Cedar Street — love the patio.

Barbecue joint: Lamberts, because it gives you live music, great food and a casual setting.

Tex-Mex heaven: Vivo's — the healthiest Tex-Mex food you can get (vegetarian enchiladas and great, different margaritas). And a great place with high energy and an outdoor patio.

To dance the night away: Oil Can Harry's. The best dance music.

Lunch hangout: Z Tejas in the Arboretum, back patio. They have a great view on a sunny day. The fish tacos are great with a margarita.

Dinner with friends: I go to different restaurants for different cuisine. Roy's or Eddie V's for fish, Truluck's for seafood, Wink for a culinary experience, Habana for great ethnic food.

Romantic dinner: Aquarelle. Great food, great wine list, traditional French and quiet.

Place to see art: Blanton Museum — it's so beautiful and calming.

Snack attack: Salsarita's — as healthy as you want and quick, too.

Retail therapy: I love to shop at different places for different things: Texas Clothier for Robert Graham shirts; Lucky Soles for Mark Nason boots; and I loved By George when they had the men's store. I shopped there for facial creams, leather messenger bags, and it was the only store I bought my Prada shoes from. I miss that store terribly.

Cocktail hour: Truluck's and Eddie V's, because they are made to perfection (the Texas pour).

Place people should know about: Aquarelle — for its amazing French cuisine, very traditional and so good. And Wink, every foodie needs to go there (ask for Dickie, a wonderfully knowledgeable waiter). The menu is so creative. The menu changes daily. Their wine bar is excellent as well.

Steven Beasley, Four Seasons

Years as a concierge: 19

Hails from: Chicago

Years in Austin: 6

Favorite thing, above all else, to do in Austin: Blues on the Green in Zilker Park, because it's a great setting, free concert and great people-watching.

Coffee break: Austin Java. They have great locations that are very convenient to work, and they've got great food.

Barbecue joint: My absolute favorite is Cooper's in Llano, which is about two hours away. Here in town, County Line On the Hill in Bee Cave. I love the ribs, and it has a beautiful view.

Live music must: Cedar Street Courtyard, because it's open air and relaxed. Also the Elephant Room. The best jazz musicians will show up at the Elephant Room.

Natural setting: Mount Bonnell or the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Mount Bonnell, because when you climb all of those steps, it feels like you are getting out of the city and once you get up there, it's a spectacular view. The Wildflower Center because the way they have it set up, showcasing the natural, native plants. Showing people what you can do with native species.

Breakfast place: The Omelettry. It's very Austin. It's unpretentious and has great omelets.

Lunch hangout: Eastside Café has great food. They have a wonderful setting with the organic garden surrounding it.

Dinner with friends: Shady Grove. It has a casual, fun setting. Sit out on the patio and have a Frito pie or a fish taco.

Romantic dinner: Wink on Lamar has wonderful food and wine pairings, always uses the freshest local ingredients and I just love the setting. It's intimate.

Place to see art: The Blanton. It's a beautiful new facility and has a world-class collection.

Place to see a movie: Alamo Drafthouse on South Lamar. Enjoy a film, have something to eat or drink — it's got a real Austin vibe.

Snack attack: Taco Shack. It's something quick you can carry with you.

Retail therapy: South Lamar. Some of the new stores and boutiques that are opening there are different, and there are things you won't find in other places. And, everyone is so nice.

Place people should know about: Barton Creek Greenbelt. I think a lot of people know about it but just haven't been there. It's just such an amazing thing to go two blocks in the middle of the city and all of the sudden, you can't even see the city.

Tommy Dean, Four Seasons

Age: 54

Years as a concierge: 17

Hails from: Abilene

Years in Austin: 23

Favorite thing, above all else, to do in Austin: I like a combination of sophisticated society and natural beauty, so my favorite thing to do is hiking, kayaking or boating or attending the opera, an art opening or theater, and after, enjoying a world-class restaurant.

Coffee break: Although I love the lakeside ambience of Cafe Mozart, I'm hopeful that they make changes soon to become accessible to friends and clients in wheelchairs. Meanwhile, I really enjoy the urban hipness of Jo's on Second Street."

Live music must: Elephant Room, because I'm a jazz lover and that's where the players go to play.

Barbecue joint: That's tough. You just can't beat Salt Lick, but County Line when I'm trying to impress someone. The one on the lake.

Tex-Mex heaven: It's got to be Matt's El Rancho, because they opened the year I was born. The food is the best in the West.

Breakfast place: Considering I've sent about 200,000 people there, it's got to be Las Manitas. It exudes "Austinality" and the food is terrific.

Lunch hangout: Whole Foods. I'm proud to tell people Austin is the headquarters. I browse aisles and pick something to eat at the store.

Dinner with friends: Wink or Vespaio because they are hot and happening, and it's fun to see and be seen and enjoy great cuisine.

Romantic dinner: Jeffrey's and Hudson's on the Bend have been in Austin for so long and have honed their skills for so long. They have become like everybody's kitchen. When you go there, it's like walking into a friend's dining room.

Natural setting: I'm a hiker. My favorite close-in hikes are Wild Basin Preserve and Bull Creek Preserve. A little farther out, the trails at Pedernales Falls and Enchanted Rock state parks.

Place to see art: I like to gallery hop, but I'm particularly thrilled with the Blanton Museum. Every time I see Mr. (Jack) Blanton, I say thank you, thank you, thank you.

Snack attack: I'm embarrassed to admit it, but my favorite snack is a McDonald's hamburger and Coke Happy Meal. I go to the one on South Lamar and Barton Springs Road. I collect the little toys.

Place to see a movie: I like the Arbor Cinema because of their penchant toward foreign films, but I like the Alamo Drafthouse because they are so innovative.

Retail therapy: Uncommon Objects. It's like walking through my past, and I always get nostalgic. I have a collection of whatnots that I bought there.

Cocktail hour: I love Jeffrey's bar and I love the Driskill. And, it's too bad I work at the Four Seasons, because it would be my favorite. I like nicer bars.

Place people should know about: That would be picnicking on the grounds of the Capitol. The grounds are beautiful. It's like being in Central Park. The world is spinning all around you. There should be picnickers and lovers everywhere.

Les Clefs d'Or fun facts

Most members are multilingual.

There are only about 450 members in the U.S. and approximately 3,000 members worldwide.

To apply, a concierge must have at least five years of experience within the hotel industry and must have worked at least three years as a full-time concierge in a hotel.

It is the only national association of professional hotel concierges in the U.S.

The organization creates a worldwide network of those in the know, so if a member concierge in Austin has a question about something in France or Malaysia, the answer is often as simple as a phone call to a Les Clefs d'Or colleague in that country.

— www.lcdusa.org

Concierge match game

Above we've mentioned four feats performed by the concierges featured here. Can you guess which concierge fulfilled each request?

- A. Who found a groomer for a royal's Bengal tiger?
- B. Who stepped in and performed the wedding march when the bride's piano player was M.I.A.?
- C. Who tracked down a giant bow to tie atop a car?
- D. Who found and shipped three donkeys from Brenham to a house in California?

Concierge match game answers:

- A. Lorley Musiol
- B. Tommy Dean
- C. Steven Beasley
- D. Steven Leigh