

# Kingsbury

where **ART** and **AGRICULTURE** meet

If it weren't for the stories of some longtime Kingsbury residents, Shane Heinemeier might have never heard that his Grandma Mary was known as the Kingsbury Beauty. They said she'd whistle for her paint horse and ride it bareback to Seguin High School to watch her one-day future husband play baseball...

Although Shane grew up in San Antonio and was close to his grandparents, he had never heard some of these family stories. But, it was good neighbors and this connection to his roots that helped make the move from the Big Apple to rural Kingsbury one of the best decisions he and wife, Alison, ever made. Well...that and the transformation of his grandparents' Kingsbury land into a unique nonprofit called Habitable Spaces—a sustainable farm and artists residency program.

Alison Heinemeier says she doesn't think there's another organization quite like Habitable Spaces. They co-founded it in 2011, inspired by the desire to do something special with the land while making the cultural arts more accessible in rural areas. As working artists in New York, the Heinemeiers realized it was

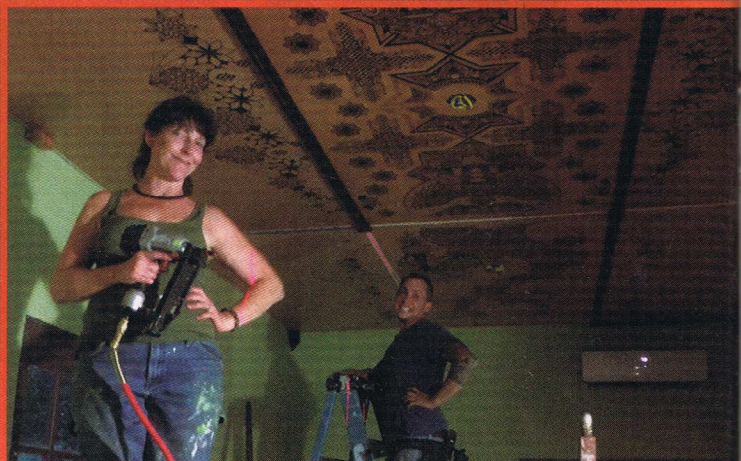
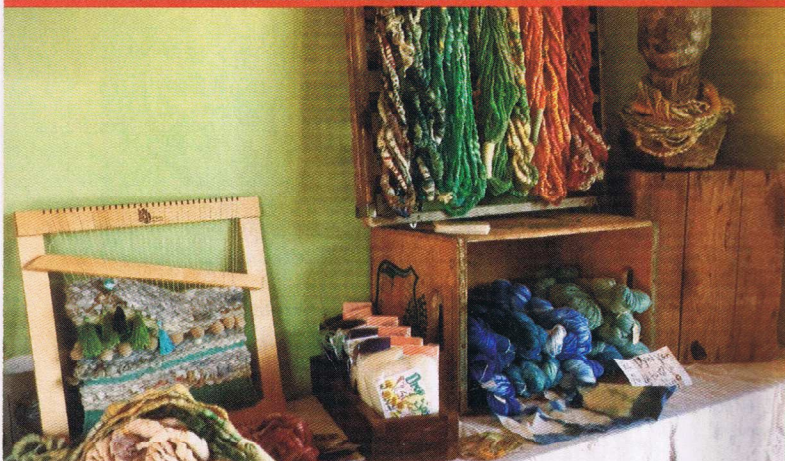
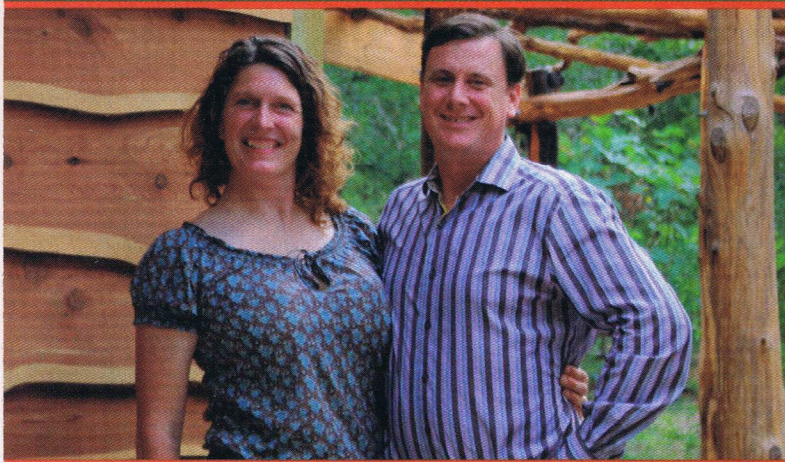
important to make the arts more relatable and not just something found in museums or at expensive galleries and black-tie events.

As an artists residency program, Habitable Spaces brings artists from the city to the farm for three months to experience what it means to live an agricultural life. In return, they integrate this new perspective into a contemporary arts project that will remain permanently on the Habitable Spaces campus for others to enjoy.

"About 20 artists from as far as Denmark, Canada and Puerto Rico have stayed at the farm and they all say it's been an amazing experience," Alison says. "They all have a farm chore in addition to their project, and one of the things they get excited about is interacting with animals that aren't house pets."

What she didn't expect was the interaction that has taken place between the artists and local community.

"It's created a lot of conversations. I didn't foresee how the artists would be inspired by the local community, who have also become the subject of their art. The artists





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are blown away by the generosity of people in rural spaces and by how hardworking they are. It's something most of them didn't know or think about."

Besides their project, the artists give workshops to the community. Topics have ranged from fiber art and yarn making to using geometry in making patterns and mandala designs. The most recent was a hands-on class building earthen walls and living roofs.

This organization is invested in the community in other ways, too; they host events that are fun while including the arts in creative ways. One of the first was their annual Summer Solstice Film Festival which is more like dinner and a movie with friends. For example, this past festival included a barbecue, art films and a stop animation film created by Cait Davis. It starred puppet versions of the Kingsbury mayor and local residents giving a colorful account of Kingsbury history.

Habitable Spaces also initiated a Fall Harvest Festival and Trading Post—now an official City of Kingsbury event. In addition to barbecue, live music, a farmers and artisans market, and petting zoo, this year's festival will

also feature an interactive performance by ArtCodex of NYC that you won't want to miss.

Then there's the farm. It's not only an integral part of the residency program, but it is also helping to make farming cool again to a new generation. It's paired with the WWOOF (World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) organization where volunteers are linked to organic farms and growers to help with daily chores while learning about farming.

On top of running Habitable Spaces, the Heinemeiers also hold fulltime jobs. And, like any good neighbor, they jumped into the thick of their adopted community. Shane belongs to the Kingsbury VFD and Alison serves as city commissioner and mayor pro tem.

"We had no idea what was in store for us when we moved back to Texas," Shane remembers. "In the beginning, we didn't quite know how we'd become part of the community and now, looking back, we're overwhelmed at how supportive everyone has been."

As for Grandma Mary? She saw Habitable Spaces in the rough stages and went to two festivals before she passed away.

"She was one of the reasons we came back to Texas when we did. We wanted to show her what we wanted to do with the farm and get her blessing, which we did," Alison remembers. "Shane's grandma was excited about what we were doing and was pretty proud of us."

Go to [www.habitablespaces.org](http://www.habitablespaces.org) to learn more about this nonprofit and upcoming events, like: the Texas Biennial in September, where they will be one of several venues showcasing the work of contemporary artists in Texas, and the Fall Harvest Festival on November 4 in downtown Kingsbury. This organization also received a POWER UP grant—read more about it on our blog at [www.gvec.org](http://www.gvec.org).

*Clockwise from top left: Alison and Shane Heinemeier, founding directors, Habitable Spaces; Volunteers sell the organization's wares at the Summer Solstice Festival; Everything is a work of art on the Habitable Spaces campus, including this bottle-wall shower; Interacting with animals can be a new experience; Artist Eleanor Sholz' wood burned design is mounted on the ceiling of the main building; A fiber display from a community workshop on making your own yarn.*

