

WHERE

Goa for Alto Paraíso, where she now lives full-time with Gaetani. Although she still loves India, she says, "It's so dirty, I would never sit in nature, you know? I'm always like, 'Jck! Alto Paraíso is the place where I've felt closest to Mother Earth.'" Farman-farmaian recently built a large villa near town, where she often hosts dinners for 40; her mother and aunt have also bought property in the area.

Still, despite the influx of fancy foreigners, Alto Paraíso is a long way from Bridgehampton: I got stuck behind a herd of cattle on my way to lunch at the horse farm of Marcia Barata, a one-time São Paulo socialite and handbag designer who lives alone with her snake, iguana, cats, pit bulls, and flock of rescued parrots. Barata comes to the door in a floor-length tie-dyed dress and shows me around while her house-boy prepares jumbo caipiroskas. "I was never like my friends in São Paulo," she says. "They were always like, 'You are a hippie!'" Barata bought her place five years ago from a Brazilian army colonel and his wife, who confided that aliens had implanted a microchip in her hand after landing their spaceship near the property.

By my third day in Alto Paraíso, I no longer find it unusual when someone is introduced to me at lunch as a shaman, or when a new acquaintance greets me with "namaste" instead of "hello." I also develop a tolerance for organic arco, first sampled at a house party where, before sitting down for lunch at 5:30 p.m., we watched a dreadlocked circus teacher named André juggle crystal balls.

As you'd guess, Alto Paraíso has its problems, some more serious than others. There is a surplus of ayurveda experts and Reiki practitioners attracted by the healing energies but still waiting for the therapist-client ratio to tilt in their favor. And there's the predictable overload of conspiracy theorists and unwashed rebels without a cause. "In a town like this you are always going to find people who are lost," says dancer-filmmaker-healer Kathi von Koerber, who lives here part-time with her partner, Colombian shaman Hernando Villa. "They don't know why they're there. They're just there." Brazil's crack problem has also made its way to the town, resulting in a spike in robberies.

But the newcomers continue to stream in, so me to build safe havens in preparation for the 2012 apocalypse prophesied by the Mayans; others simply to join the back-to-the-land movement. "There are a lot of intelligent people realizing that the world is a mess and that things need to change," says von Koerber. In the coming months, zoologist Marianne Soisalo is opening Eco Nois, a large environmental center complete with exhibit space and a raw-food café, and Daniela Shook, a former model from São Paulo, is planning to add upscale accommodations at the town spa, Mandala.

You can tell a lot about a place by the words you pick up in the local language while visiting. After a week in Alto Paraíso—okay, two weeks; I extended my stay following the toucan incident—my Portuguese repertoire includes *periquito* (parakeet), *mira-cao* (head trip), *desenvolvimento sustentável* (sustainable development), and *As respostas a suas perguntas ja estão dentro de voce* (The answers to your questions are already within you). That last line was another pronouncement of Catarina of the Waterfalls. She said it like she really meant it. ♦

For where to eat, stay, and kick back in Alto Paraíso, see *Backstory*, page 290.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE LIFTOFF

Most people associate Houston with Enron, NASA, and big hair. But, as MICHAEL SLENSKE reports, a growing number of creative types are striving to make H-Town the cultural hub it was when Philip Johnson and the de Menils first injected it with modernity.



MORTAR Last year Iris Siff and Sacha Nelson opened *Mortar*, a men's wear boutique stocked with such indie faves as Zero + Maria Cornejo, Kansas City, Missouri's Baldwin Denim, and Brooklyn's Hollander & Ixler. In February the pair inaugurated a back-room "meeting place" in their new space with Randy Twaddle's "Transformer" series of minimalist charcoal prints (on gouache and T-shirts) of the city's ubiquitous electric boxes. Says Siff, "It's taking what's terrible and ugly about Houston and making it modern, contemporary, and beautiful!" (shopmortar.com)

PHILIPPE RESTAURANT and LOUNGE Philippe Schmit earned his stripes in kitchens that matter (New York's *Le Bernardin*, Houston's *Bistro Moderne*), so when it came time to open his namesake restaurant in January, he felt it was okay to show off just a tiny bit. "I have a camera in the kitchen so guests can see the food being made," says Schmit, who's mixing local ingredients, French techniques, and cowboy faves in dishes like a BBQ Caesar salad or seared scallops in a pomegranate sauce with Houston's Saint Arnold beer (philippehouston.com).



HAMILTON SHIRTS For 128 years Hamilton Shirts has been dressing spiffy Texans in bespoke Egyptian and Sea Island cotton button-downs. In February Kelly and David Hamilton debuted a new ready-to-wear collection with the same rich fabrics and plush placket and collar linings. The brother-sister duo is also planning a women's line for next year (hamiltonshirts.com).



LA COLOMBE D'OR Modeled—and named—after the French inn where Picasso and Matisse traded art for food, this small hotel on Montrose Boulevard has just reopened its restaurant as *Cinq* (for the mansion's five guest rooms, which got a *TexBoko* facelift). New owners Dan and Mark Zimmerman tapped 27-year-old *Mansion* on Turtle Creek alum Jeramie Robison to tackle the *locavore* menu comprising both classic fare (herb-rubbed Colorado rack of lamb) and modern (roasted rabbit saddle with pear d'Anjou). (locolambedorhouston.com).



SLOAN/HALL For years Marcus Sloan and Shannon Hall have sold baubles to Houston's social queens. Now they're going edgy, via local designer Jessica Meyer's *BulletGirl* line of gold-plate bullet shells sourced from her grandfather's Mexican ammo factory. This spring the shop is also introducing a namesake collection of necklaces made from Native American beads and arrowheads—many paved with diamonds (sloanhall.com).

FOUND FOR THE HOME At *Found*, their four-year-old design emporium, Aaron Rambo and Ruth Davis turn industrial scraps into must-have furniture pieces, like a chandelier made by fitting Edison bulbs into an inverted 19th-century bottling rack. "I spent nine days in France last summer," says Rambo, "and brought back a 40-foot container full of stuff." Expect that trove to become the fall 2011 lamp collection (foundforthehome.com).



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW DE FRANCESCO