

# BYGONE TREASURE

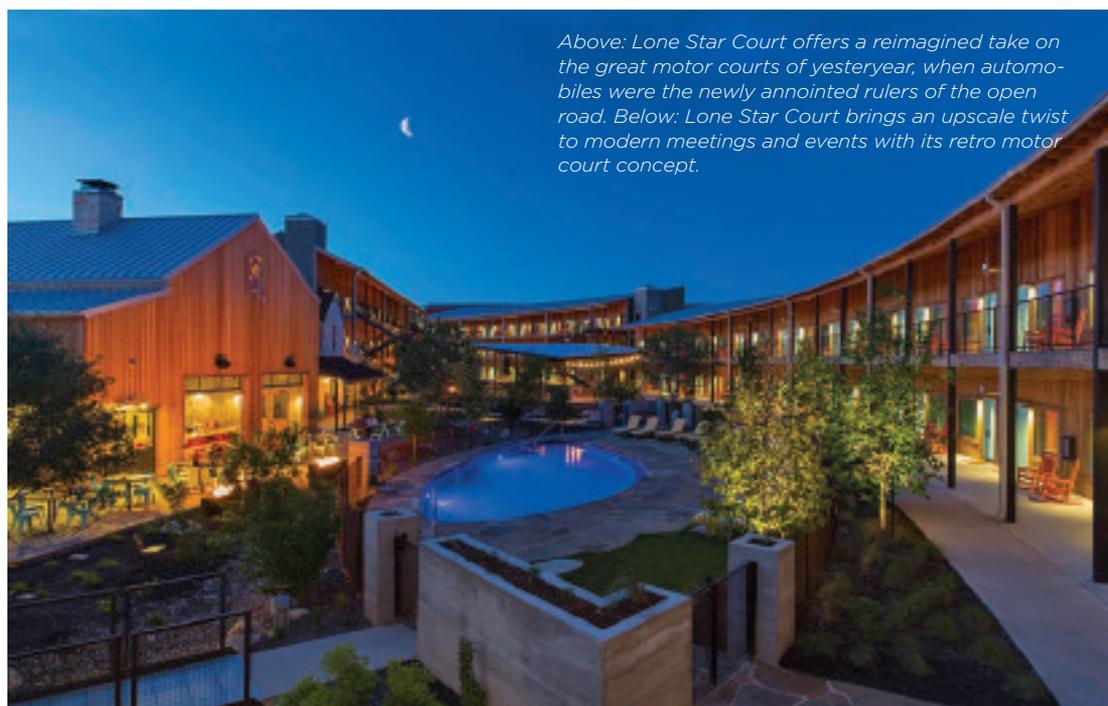
The golden age of motor courts has come and gone, or has it? One Texas company launches a revival with its modern version.

BY R. CHAD DOVE

THE AGE OF THE MOTOR COURT BEGAN IN EARNEST with the 1920s explosion in popularity of the automobile, particularly Henry Ford's Model T. Between 1900 and 1930, the number of automobiles on U.S. roadways jumped from approximately 8,000 to roughly 23 million. With many of these new car owners hitting the highways, the demand for roadside lodging erupted and thus gave birth to the motor court.

In the early days, many motor courts featured a collection of boxy cabins around a central landscaped courtyard. Most facilities were locally owned mom-and-pop businesses with unique and regionally inspired décor. Then, because of the scarcity of materials during WWII, individual cabins gave way to rooms within a single long building. Despite the more utilitarian design, creative architectural features such as awnings and porticos were used to provide the appearance of independent spaces.

While tourism declined sharply during the early 1940s, post-war prosperity in America spawned a boom in the automobile tourism industry. According to one estimate, the number of motor courts or motels in the U.S. grew from roughly 20,000 in 1940 to more than 60,000 in 1960. Throughout this period, ame-

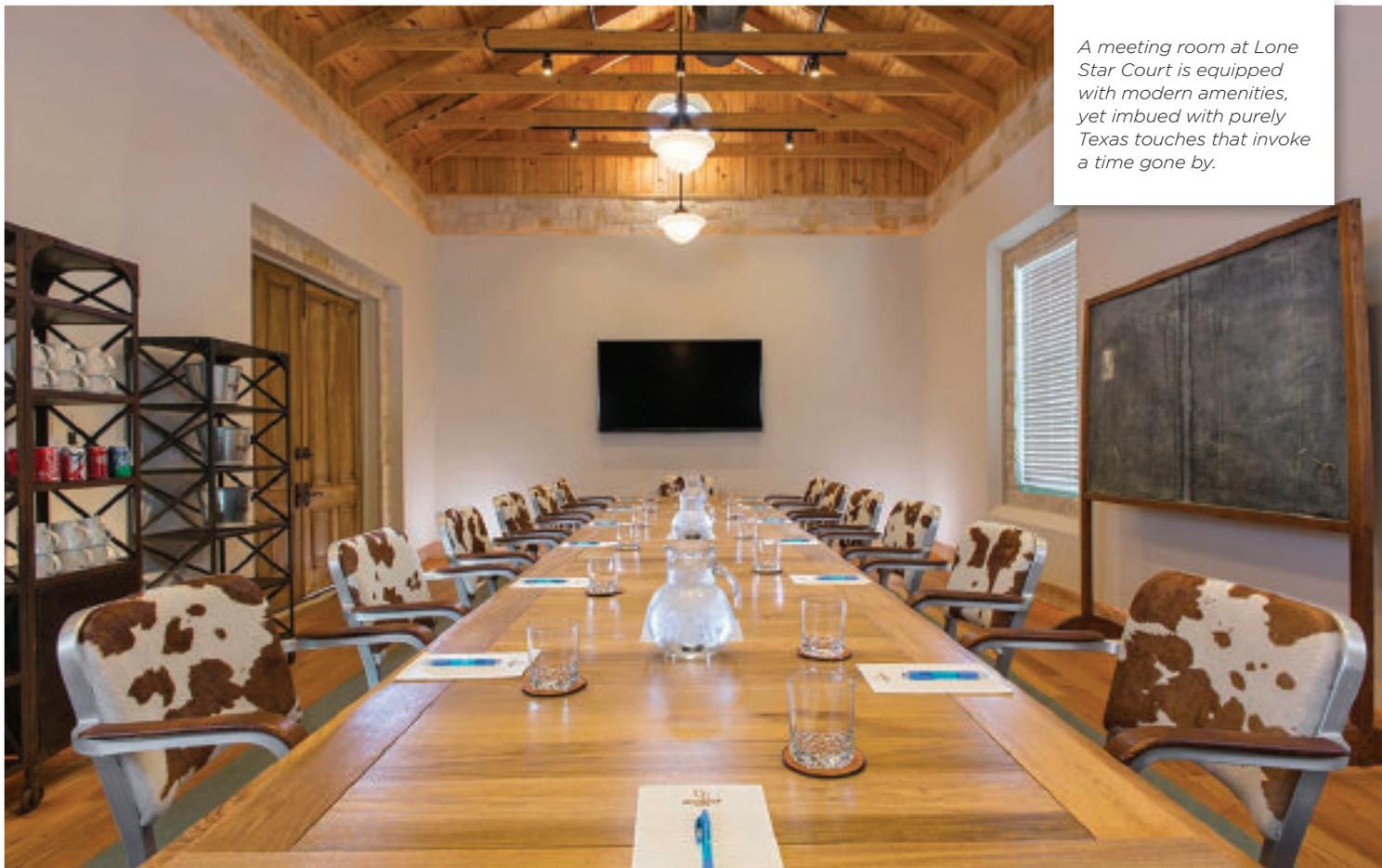


*Above: Lone Star Court offers a reimagined take on the great motor courts of yesteryear, when automobiles were the newly anointed rulers of the open road. Below: Lone Star Court brings an upscale twist to modern meetings and events with its retro motor court concept.*

nities such as air conditioning, televisions and swimming pools became more common and properties beckoned to motorists with bright neon signs. The industry enjoyed nearly two decades of robust business.

Ironically, the very highways that sparked the motor court trend were in large part the

cause of its decline. When President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act into law, it was the beginning of the end. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, construction of the new interstate highway system frequently cut off access to existing motor courts or bypassed them altogether.



*A meeting room at Lone Star Court is equipped with modern amenities, yet imbued with purely Texas touches that invoke a time gone by.*

Adding fuel to the fire, national hotel chains expanded rapidly along the new interstate highways.

Fast forward roughly four decades and Valencia Group is putting a new, upscale spin on the classic motor court with its court-concept boutique hotels. “Our court hotels are our take on the motor courts of yesteryear, when travel was an adventure and we sat in the back seat asking, “Will this place have a pool?”” says Amy Trench, corporate director of brand marketing for Valencia Group. “We have taken that nostalgic emotion and added modern amenities to give guests an unforgettable experience, offering live music and engaging outdoor areas for social activities. Or you can sit on your porch in your rocking chair and watch all of the activity.”

**Lone Star Court**

Valencia Group, a Texas-based luxury hotel management company, introduced its retro court-concept in 2013 with Lone Star Court.

The property is situated on 4 acres in the Domain, a high-density retail, dining, entertainment, office and residential center located in the tech corridor of northwest Austin. The 123-room property offers a taste of historic Americana including a vintage-inspired neon sign and a restored 1952 Buick Roadmaster parked in front of the office used for guest transportation.

The multiple buildings at Lone Star Court are all inward facing and arranged to create a secluded feel for guests enjoying the open-air courtyard. Several footbridges cross an arroyo running through the length of the courtyard. Amenities include furnished porches, fire pits, games, a swimming pool, and complimentary Wi-Fi, bicycle rental and car service to surrounding areas. Vintage-inspired Smeg refrigerators can be found in each room stocked with local favorites. Guest rooms are adorned with tasteful retro-inspired furnishings specifically designed for the property and artwork that echoes local history and culture.

Lone Star Court offers approximately 2,000 square feet of interior event space split between the nearly 1,500-square-foot Tack Room and the 440-square-foot Sisterdale School House. The 1,600-square-foot covered outdoor Ladybird Pavilion, and the 1,800-square-foot open-air event lawn. Event planners have an abundance of choices for off-site activities with the restaurants, retail and entertainment venues of the Domain within easy distance of the property. Lone Star Court is a few blocks from the MoPac Expressway and 30 minutes of the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

“Lone Star Court is a perfect environment for group stays and meetings. The natural Texas Hill Country landscape gives a feel of a campsite retreat rather than a generic, corporate meeting,” says John Thomas, general manager for Lone Star Court. “Groups can lounge by the pool, enjoy live music in the bar, sit by one of our wood campfires and roast marshmallows, or sip some coffee and catch up on our front porch rocking chairs. No

PHOTOS: VALENCIA GROUP

**COMING SOON:**  
*Texican Court*

Officials with Valencia Group recently revealed plans for their next retro court exclusively to *Texas Meetings + Events*. The newest property is named Texican Court and will be located directly across the street from the Irving Convention Center. Texican Court will feature 152 guest rooms and 3,000 square feet of event space. The theme for the retro-inspired boutique hotel is a blend of the Texas and Mexican cultures that helped settle the state when Irving was still a cow town. The designer for the project—as well as the first two Valencia court concept properties—is the Houston-based Rottet Studio. Texican Court is slated to open in fall 2018.

Valencia Group is an integrated hospitality company which provides management, development and branding for full-service, independent hotels owned by the company. Additional Valencia properties include Hotel Valencia Santana Row in San Jose, California, the newly remodeled Hotel Valencia Riverwalk in San Antonio, Hotel Sorella CITYCENTRE in Houston, The George in College Station—scheduled to open September 2017, and the group’s first five-star property Hotel Alessandra Houston opening October 2017.



*Cavalry Court's outdoor spaces feature room to mingle by the pool or gather in one of several quiet conversation areas. Below: Inspired by the region's rustic military history, the suites at Cavalry Court embody a subdued luxury.*



matter the purpose of the meeting, Lone Star Court promotes a sense of camaraderie in a laid-back, Texas style.”

**Cavalry Court**

In November 2016, Valencia Group opened its second court-concept boutique hotel, Cavalry Court, in College Station. The 141-room retro, military-inspired property draws on the area’s rich Texas A&M history. Guests are greeted by a vintage military jeep parked near the Guard House office and an image of the original 12th man, E. King Gill, in the lobby. The military theme is carried throughout the property, from a lobby coffee table covered in toy army men to the camp tent pool cabanas, to the names of the buildings—The Barracks, The Quarters and The Canteen bar and grill.

Cavalry Court is in Century Square, a 60-acre mixed-use development adjacent to

the Texas A&M campus. Groups can make the most of their time with off-site retail, restaurant and entertainment venues in the pedestrian-friendly Century Square or spend their entire stay within the confines of Cavalry Court. The layout of the property provides guests with a sense of community within the courtyard, along with amenities such as a fire pits that resemble military field bunkers, intimate seating areas, pingpong and a swimming pool. Additional complimentary amenities include breakfast, Wi-Fi and limited car service. Retro-looking Smeg refrigerators stock local food and beverages and complement the specially designed armoires, which are reminiscent of an army footlocker. For dining, guests can visit The Canteen bar and grill or make use of the food truck, The Tack Shack, which is a converted horse trailer.

A variety of event spaces are available at

Cavalry Court, including a 2,870-square-foot indoor ballroom named The Stables, The Saddle Room, which can accommodate up to 16 people, the 1,500-square-foot covered outdoor Pavilion, and the 1,900-square-foot open air Parade Green. “We offer multiple outdoor spaces. We have a spacious pool area with private cabanas, including plenty of seating and televisions to capture a slide show,” says Marcus Latner, general manager for Cavalry Court. “Guests can have meaningful interactions mingling by the pool and there is plenty of room to gather and socialize.”

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