

# Life & Arts

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**Shelley Wood** FOR AMERICAN-STATESMAN  
Writer Pam Penick became hooked on reading garden blogs specific to Central Texas; then she started one of her own.

## Locals reap what they sow, then blog

Internet is fertile ground for journals on local gardening

By Pam Penick  
SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Austin is known worldwide for its live music scene. But did you know that Austin might be the garden-blogger capital of the world? More people in Austin blog (keep online journals, or web logs) about gardening and plants than anywhere else, according to an informal survey of several blog directories. Whatever it is that drives people to keep a blog — ego, a sense of community, creative urges, the freedom to self-publish — Austin has become fertile ground. At least 10 call Austin home — more than any other city — and have boosted the city’s profile among gardening readers. What is it about Austin that has encouraged so many garden blogs? Kathy Kloba, who writes a blog titled The Transplantable Rose, says she thinks Austin’s subtropical climate has something to do with it. “We can grow edgy plants and have something to write about all year,” she says, “but we still have seasons, which is much more interesting than a genuinely tropical climate.” Melissa Stevens, one of the first garden bloggers in the country with her Zanthan Gardens blog that she started in 2001, says she believes Austin’s tech-savvy nature plays a part as well. “I think more Austinites rely on computers to

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*In Faith*  
Assemblies of God minister Duane Gryder leaves the pulpit for the highway, spreading the Christian message to bikers.  
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*In Gardening*  
Former Washington D.C. resident Arati Pandya Singh finds home is where your heart, and your garden, are.  
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**Don Tate II** AMERICAN-STATESMAN

# Be not afraid

Quirk. Peccadillo. Preference. Eccentricity. We all have one: the little something to be avoided — a food, a situation, a feeling. But for some, that quirk is really a phobia — a debilitating, unreasonable fear. Football commentator John Madden is open about his fear of flying and travels by luxury coach between stadiums. Howard Hughes was known for his phobia of germs and often wore tissue boxes on his feet. Jack Nicholson’s character in “As Good as It Gets” takes his own plastic tableware to restaurants and avoids lines in the sidewalk. These folks had the resources to accommodate their preferences. Fortunate? Perhaps. Television’s fictional Adrian Monk parades his obsessive-compulsive behavior in a humorous way for one hour a week, but what if every hour of



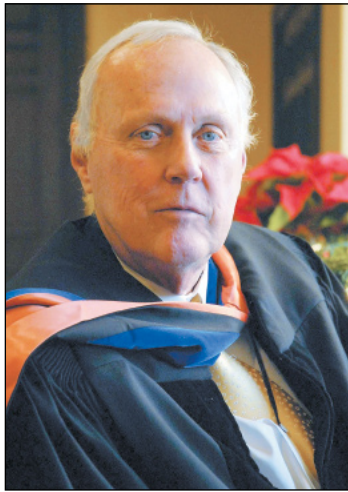
**Jane Greig**

every day were that intense? My little peccadillo is less dramatic. I avoid drinking water from the bathroom faucet. My preference for kitchen water has no basis in fact. No bizarre incident involving a plumber or bathrooms haunts my dreams. I know all tap water has the same source and, for the most part, travels through the same pipes. But as I march like the penguins to the kitchen all the way across the house instead of to the bathroom 10 feet away for a drink of water at night, Gnarl Barkley’s lyrics echo in my head: “Does that make me crazy? Possibly ...” Over the years I have assisted folks with various fears — fears that kept them from traveling or seeking health care, caused them to wear certain colors or avoid the number 13. When do these accommodations cross the line from normal to not? Is refusing to touch the door handle in a public bathroom prudent or the first step on the road to a Howard Hughes level of germ avoidance? What does it mean when your internal dialogue turns self-deprecating? Do debilitating phobias begin as simple behavior preferences?

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When you fear the worst, hope for the best: You might have a phobia, and you can learn to get past it

## Austin writers have always longed for Old Austin, Graham says



**Marsha Miller**/2006 UT AUSTIN  
University of Texas’ Don Graham has taught a class on the literature of the Southwest since 1976.

Editor of ‘Literary Austin’ gathers some of best works from our city

By Roger Gathman  
SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

“As I researched Austin literature going back to the late 19th century,” says Don Graham, “I found one pattern at least that was consistent. A week after somebody moved here, he immediately started moaning and groaning about how much Austin had changed.” Graham grins. “The true Austin is always being lost.” Graham, a white-haired, genial man with a ghost of Northern Texas twang in his voice, has taught the Life and Literature of the Southwest course in the English Department at the University of Texas since 1976, so he’s seen a lot of people arrive in Austin. His latest book, “Literary Austin,” is an anthology of works by Austin writers that includes essays, memoirs, poems and stories, ranging from

an O. Henry booster piece about the town to Graham’s own recounting of a party in which a dead Austin literary celebrity (obviously Billy Lee Brammer) seems to be the connecting link among all the participants. In between, there are some surprises — including a distinct bias in favor of political writings by people such as Ann Richards and Molly Ivins. Graham’s Southwest lit course gives him a peculiar connection to Austin’s literary history, since the course was started by the legendary J. Frank Dobie, author of many Southwest histories in the 1940s and ’50s. Dobie’s name might only be known to younger Austinites for its attachment to the UT dorm and shopping mall, but most have seen his likeness: a statue of Dobie, Roy Bedichek (author of “Adventures of a Texas Naturalist”) and Walter P. Webb (author of “The Texas Rangers”) stands in front of Barton Springs Pool. The statue and the O. Henry house mark the extent to which Austin officially recognizes its writers. Dobie, Bedichek and Webb figure in Graham’s anthology mainly as Olympian presences, against which the writers of the ’60s began to kick.

Thus, Larry McMurtry, in his selection from 1968, writes, defiantly: “Mr. Dobie, Mr. Bedichek and Dr. Webb lived in Austin for many years, but the city never became their spiritual property ...” So whose is it? I met Graham for coffee at Whole Foods to find out.

**Austin American-Statesman: At the beginning of “Giant Country,” your 1999 essay collection, you wrote that “Houston (is) the best Texas has to offer in the way of cities,” and you rather defiantly compare it to Austin: “People in Houston wear shoes, unlike Austin, the Birkenstock capital of the free world.” Have you changed your mind about Austin?**  
**Don Graham:** Well, you don’t see a lot of Birkenstocks anymore, do you? (Laughs.) I wrote that mainly because of food. Houston has the best restaurants. Austin has better restaurants now, but Houston still has the best restaurants. As for changes, well, Austin is increasingly clotted with

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**Literary Austin**  
**What:** Discussion and signing with Don Graham and other contributors  
**When:** 7 to-night  
**Where:** Barnes & Noble Arboretum, 10000 Research Blvd.  
**Information:** 418-8985