

ON THE Hunt

For many Bayou Men, the thrill of the hunt is one of the most irresistible experiences they can imagine. Some would argue that the hunting spirit is so deeply rooted in the human psyche that it's aboriginal—primal. They say, we are gatherers, certainly, but also hunters. Not every Bayou Man embraces hunting, but it is bigger than you may realize. If you don't own your own lease, but still want to get in on the experience, here are some ideas.

In and around Houston, hunting bigger game isn't a readily available option for most Bayou Men, but, fortunately, a handful of hunting clubs that offer their members a premiere waterfowl hunting experience are springing up in several locations. One of the longest-running clubs of this kind is the Thunderbird Hunting Club and Lodge. Since

1986, the club has offered membership to men and women, inviting them 80 miles southwest to El Campo, where they'll tramp about in a meticulously groomed, 20,000-acre wetlands tract. The spacious site invites a wide assortment of wild duck and geese species, and even some sandhill cranes that are fair game in Texas.

Todd Steele, who co-founded the club with his business partner Paul McDonald, says the lure of this experience is undeniable.

"It's almost an addiction, when people get involved in this kind of hunting," he says. "[Club members] come here, get up in the morning and it's cold, the wind is howling, it's wet. But they inevitably get pumped about duck hunting. It's all about getting into the elements and down to Mother Nature."

Steele points out that, unlike some hunting clubs where the game is farmed on the premises and set free just prior to the hunt, the game at his club is completely wild—migratory birds that fly south from Canada.

"We create the habitat that attracts them and they flock to it," he says.

Some Bayou Men prefer scanning the horizon for clay pigeons to those fluttering on the wing. It's all a matter of taste. In that regard, Houston's American Shooting Center in George Bush Park has been a sport shooter's paradise since 1989. Situated on 563 spacious acres, the club offers rifle and pistol range shooting with more than 200 positions, and—separately—skeet, trap and clay fields, all supported by quality staff. -BM ♦



TODD STEELE

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