

KEEPING UP WITH THE SOUTHERN JAZZ

TEXT AND PHOTOS: APURBA JAHANGIR



The first thing you will notice after landing in Austin- Bergstrom International Airport is it's appreciation for music, American football, and bicycles. When the luggage pick up stand is fully decorated with monuments of famous guitars, you know you're up for a very melodic experience in this southern city. From the famous Willie Nelson, Lance Armstrong, the southern blues hub to the Austin City Limits (The first ever live music show for television), the famous 6th Street and the Legendary Long Horns – this town offers the most amazing and equally weird experience for tourists. They say, "Keep Austin Weird", and from my experience, I know exactly why.

On December 22, 2015 I reached Austin in search of a 15-day-break from all the hustle and bustle of life. After an almost 24-hour-journey, Austin welcomed me with arms wide open, playing the famous song 'American Dream', by none other than Willie Nelson and Bob Dylan, in the airport. I headed straight for my home for the next 15 days, the Good All Wooten Dorn.

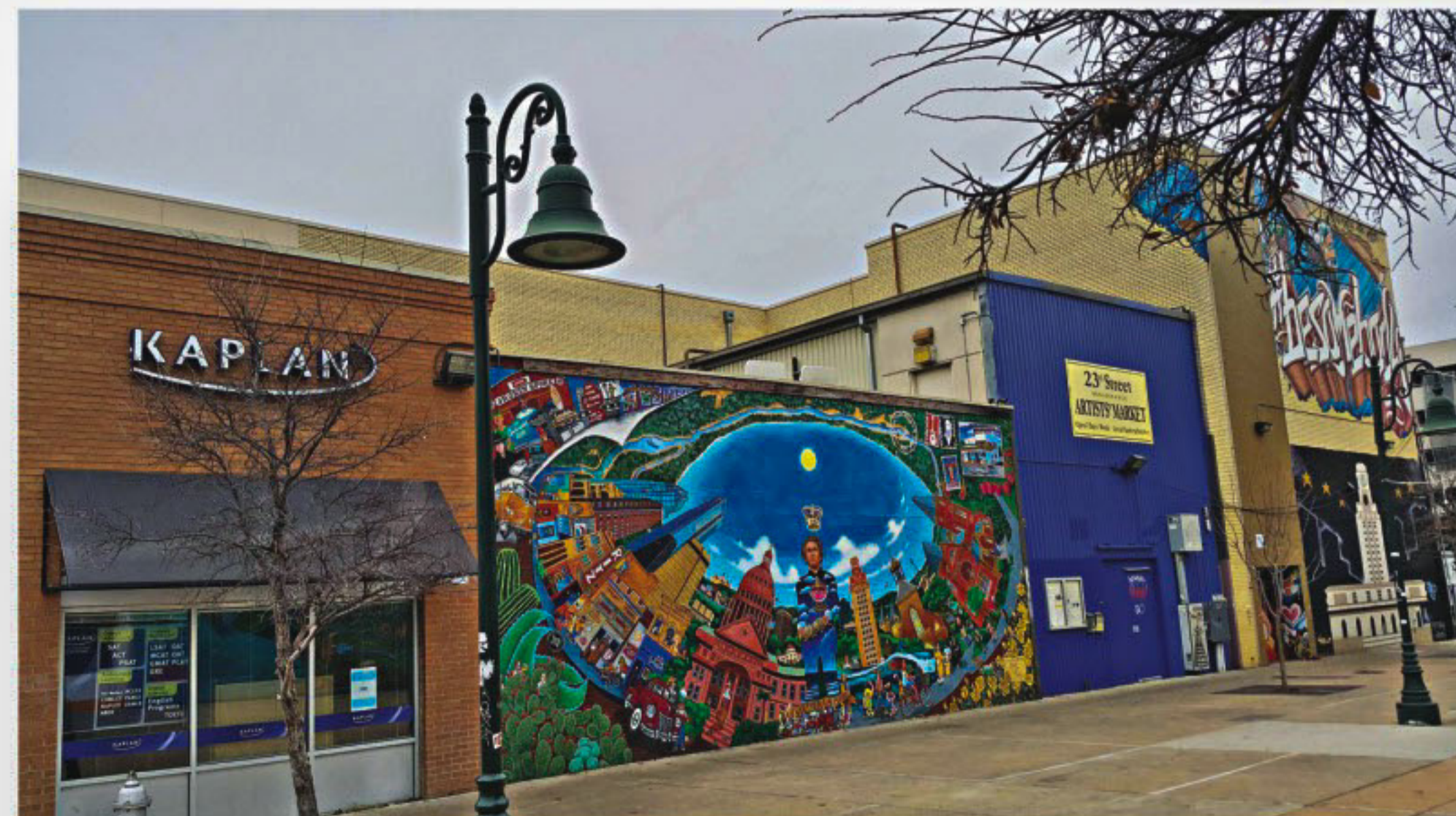
Located in Guadeloupe Street, right opposite to the University of Austin, I had

the privilege of seeing the southern student lifestyle. The street proudly represents Austinites' love for their football team the Long Horns. Everything and anything that exists have a Long Horn version in the university store. Austinites' love for art also reflects not only on the Guadeloupe Street but all over Austin. All the corners of the walls are covered with wall paintings – from Andy Warhol's pop-art, to Salvador Dali's surrealism. To take in this beauty, there were bicycles around for rent.

After a long night's rest, my adventures first took me to Mellow Johnny's Bike Shop. For the famous Lance Armstrong, the city is known for its bicycle shops. It is a must see for bicycle enthusiasts or anyone who visits Austin. Mellow Johnny's was not only a store but a gallery of famous bicycles. From the first carbon made bicycle to race Tour de France to showcasing the prototypes of future bikes, they showcased it all. More of a museum tour, Mellow Johnny's kept me busy for a whole day. After the sun came down, my destination was the famous 6th Street; the musical side of Austin.

Like our very own Banani 11, 6th Street goes in a straight line for three kilometres. On entering the street one will hear different genres of live music from different pubs and restaurants. As musicians will put it, every corner of the street had its own bass line. Every place had its own theme. From playing classic Sinatra's to covering Ed Sheeran's top charts, the street serves the best Austin

Pizza's, Papa John's to Di Aumle; serving the best ingredient to go with the music. The mesmerising stroll took me to the end of the street and towards Austin Lake. The fifteen days went in the blink of an eye and they all had different stories. Whatever they were, these places were tied with them. These hubs and their people are the reason Austin is and forever will be weirdly astonishing. ■



A HOME TO REMEMBER

M H HAIDER
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



There was always an overpowering aura that surrounded him. Still today, long after his tragic death, the overwhelming feeling still manages to grip us when we listen to his speeches or see his photos. Is it because he embodied an immense, awe-inspiring charisma? Is it because he was a die-hard rebel who cared minimum about the safety and security of his own life whilst devoting his lifetime for the cause of his people?

Fidel Castro had once commented about him: "I have not seen the Himalayas. But I have seen Sheikh Mujib." The global media deemed Bangabandhu as the 'poet of politics'.

And a political man he was. A visionary. A patriot. But to know the person behind the legend, a visit to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's residence would do a lot, because it introduces the political man, as a family man.

Whenever we say 'Dhanmondhi Bottirish' - Dhanmondi Road # 32, that is - we instantaneously think about Bangabandhu Bhaban, the three-storied building where our Father of the Nation used to live. The house is now a museum.

As you enter the premises, the same, familiar overwhelming feeling overtakes you; after all, you are entering the den of one of the greatest leaders the world has ever seen.

But resolutely look for the family man. And you just might be able to get a glimpse of him.

Because, after all, it was his home. What are the things that make a home, home? As you enter the first floor, you will spot an aquarium, which belonged to Sheikh Russell. A (vintage) television set sits on a corner. A small dining table. Crochery. A Coca Cola bottle. A beautiful veranda. You could easily imagine how it was when Bangabandhu and his family lived there.

But unlike most homes, many of its walls are dotted with bullet holes - a



testament to the massacre that was the assassination of Bangabandhu and most of his family.

The stairway deserves special attention: it is where, on 15 August of 1975, the great man lay.

The steps are now covered by glass - with rose petals sprinkled over them - preserving blood marks. A flag hangs on one of the walls. Bullet marks are scattered here and there. A bunch of blood-red roses are kept on a holder. A painting by Shahabuddin Ahmed - an agonised Bangabandhu clutching his blood-smeared chest - hangs on another wall of the stairway.

With the ambience created, we may only try to imagine and recreate in our minds the event that took place in the house that fateful day. As the team was bringing the fifty five year old Mujib down the stairs, he shouted, "Where are you taking me?" At that point, one of the assassins opened fire, changing the course of history forever.

The three-storied building hosts - other than bedrooms, living rooms, et al - office and meeting rooms too. The museum houses the personal objects of the leader and his family - from the Mujib coat to his smoking pipes.

Behind the residence, a new, modern gallery has been constructed. It takes you through the journey of Mujib - his early political years, rise to leadership, the liberation war and down to Bangabandhu as a leader of the independent Bangladesh. Featuring multimedia presentation, the annexe is a treasure box filled with relevant and invaluable photographs, magazine covers, newspaper articles, etc.

The house, along with the new establishment, would not fail to connect you with Bangabandhu a little more intimately.

Business hours: 10am-5pm. Closed on Wednesday. ■