

Cool Cowboy

Lyle Lovett—singer, poet, TV star and Houston icon—adds a line to his résumé: fashion designer.

| By Tara Seetharam |



In a music industry that changes as swiftly as the technology that supports it, 55-year-old Lyle Lovett is a disarmingly steady force. For more than 30 years, the singer-songwriter has glided along his own path—somewhere along the fringes of folk, blues, jazz, gospel and swing—flirting with fame just long enough to sustain his status as an iconic Texas figure.

That figure is defined as much by the four-time Grammy winner's quirky and high-haired persona, which famously attracted ex-wife Julia Roberts, as it is by his revered craft, which garnered him the Americana Music Association's inaugural Trailblazer Award in 2007. Lovett, also an accomplished actor, is a different breed of cowboy—quiet and humble, yes, but also cosmopolitan and cultured. It's a blend that can only be explained by the city that produced him.

"It's Houston's diversity that's influenced my music more than anything," he says, reflecting on the breadth of music and culture with which he grew up in the small Houston-area town of Klein. "And Houston is more diverse now than ever. I'm forever getting a fresh perspective on the city."

Lovett's family legacy here spans generations—his mom, 83, still lives in town—strengthened by the purchase of his grandpa's farm in Klein, which he actively maintains. And next month he'll have one more H-Town connection, as his line of men's Western dress shirts, Lyle Lovett for Hamilton Shirts, hits Hamilton Shirts stores on Richmond Avenue and Post Oak Boulevard.

The collaboration arose thoughtfully, after years of custom orders from the local high-end tailor. Over time, Lovett fiddled with the shape of the yoke and the shades of the horn buttons, among other details, until he had a clean, classic design that matched his taste; think sophisticated yet understated, as in Prada and cowboy boots. He asked co-owner David Hamilton if his design might appeal to other customers.

"I'm excited to inflict my taste and opinion on other people," Lovett laughs. The ready-to-wear shirts, starting at \$225, come in 23 different fabrics. For his part, he sports them everywhere from horse shows across the South to the L.A. set of the new FX cop drama, *The Bridge*.

Lovett's business savvy could afford him a number of other career-stretching opportunities—"There's something exciting about being able to do whatever you can think of," he says—but the musician remains focused on playing the road. Earlier this year, he wrapped an intimate, fan-demanded acoustic tour with Texas A&M pal Robert Earl Keen, and now he's performing his earnest tunes across the country with His Large Band. Touring inspires his writing process, he says, hinting at an upcoming album.

For Lovett, work and pleasure have always been intertwined, so much so that the concept of retirement doesn't seem to register. "Heck, I think I've been retired my whole life," he says. "I can't imagine not doing what I do."