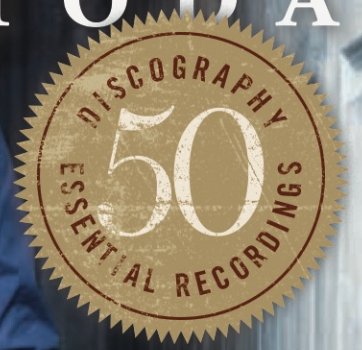


# Oklahoma<sup>TM</sup>

From Ada to Tishomingo!

## TODAY



### The Country MUSIC *Issue*

Blake Shelton finds his  
*Voice*—and superstardom.

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"We all got a hillbilly bone deep inside."

—BLAKE SHELTON

# Contents

SEPTEMBER • OCTOBER 2011 | VOLUME 61, NUMBER 5

*Hunk alert!* ↘

## FEATURES

### 49 **Something in the Water**

Oklahoma's country music landscape—which predates the Dust Bowl and continues to unfold—is as varied as the land that nurtured it.

*By Holly Bailey*

### 62 **Roger and Out**

The life and times of Roger Miller, who do-wacka-did life on his own terms and in his own inimitable style.

*By Randy Krebbiel*

### 69 **Stand by Your Fans**

If a country musician sings a song and no one hears it, does it make a sound? This crowd-pleasing portfolio shows the importance of the listener to the message.

### 74 **Team Blake**

With a number-one album, a countrified princess bride, a ranch near Tishomingo, and a star turn on *The Voice*, Ada native Blake Shelton's career is off the charts.

*By Dyrinda Tyson*

### 82 **Flash Back**

As all good alumni know, the best lessons often are learned outside the classroom—in this case, at Willie's Saloon in Stillwater.

*By Gordon Grice*

### 86 **Pure Country**

Fifty essential country recordings from singing cowboys to the Grand Lady of the Grand Ole Opry to Thompson Square

*By Ryan LaCroix*



"Team Blake," page 74



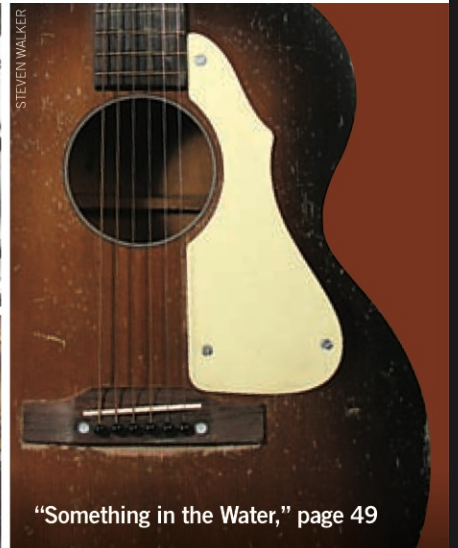
"Roger and Out," page 62



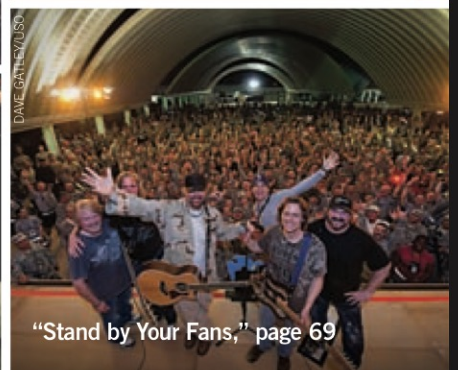
"Flash Back," page 82



Cross Canadian Ragweed's *Soul Gravy*, page 88 of "Pure Country"



"Something in the Water," page 49



"Stand by Your Fans," page 69





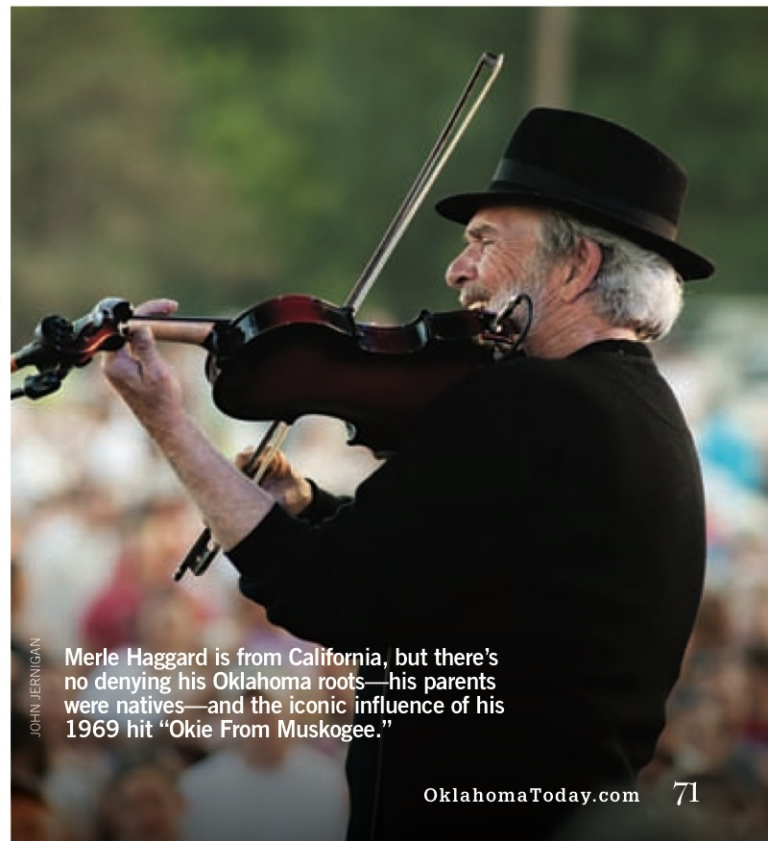
LEWIS JACOBS/NBC

Blake Shelton and Adam Levine of Maroon 5 worked the crowd on the June 7, 2011, episode of NBC's *The Voice*.



TRACY LEEDS/NBC

Queen of Country Music Reba McEntire performed on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* on November 3, 2010.



JOHN JERNIGAN

Merle Haggard is from California, but there's no denying his Oklahoma roots—his parents were natives—and the iconic influence of his 1969 hit "Okie From Muskogee."



## Team

## Blake

By Dyrinda Tyson

The reigning Country Music Association Male Vocalist of the Year makes his home near Lake Texoma while juggling a grueling schedule, a new marriage, and his most recent star turn on reality TV. Welcome to 2011, the year that unleashed Blake Shelton on the world.

**B**LAKE SHELTON ENJOYS wandering outside on the rare mornings he's home to drop a line and see if the fish are biting. Sometimes they are. Sometimes they aren't. And then he might pull out his phone and tweet about it. More than half a million people follow him on Twitter, where he shares a steady stream of jokes, pictures, shout-outs, and general observations.

"It's fun because I can instantly have contact with my fans and talk to them and argue with them and laugh with them," he says. "That's the relationship I wanted to create with my fan base. I don't want to be standoffish or fake."

Some say he's the real deal—occasionally too real. He shrugs it off.

"I guarantee you that if Hank Williams Senior or Waylon Jennings or even Hank Junior would've had Twitter at my stage of the game, they would've loved it, too," Shelton says. "They were just themselves. They didn't make any apologies for that."

Neither does Shelton. He occasionally smooths feathers ruffled by his off-the-cuff remarks, but he wears his redneck cred proudly. Barbed wire and deer tracks

circle his forearm in tattoo form, and his boots manage to stay just this side of too shiny. He's lent his initials to his fan club, the BSers. But, like his home state, there's more to Blake Shelton than rugged charm. In short, he may well reflect the face of contemporary country music.

A steady stream of artists has made the trek from Sooner country to Nashville over the decades—Gene Autry, Roger Miller, Reba McEntire, Carrie Underwood—Oklahomans each claiming a stake in country music's storied Mecca.

Shelton is following that well-worn path, but the steps along it are all his own. Halfway across the country, in a land some deem "La-La," a native son is finding a new audience and a privileged position in Oklahoma's country music pantheon.

"You make me look smart," Shelton drawls one night to a Team Blake protégé on NBC's *The Voice*, the blockbuster amateur singing competition that has made him the worst-kept secret outside country music circles. Even alongside other big show-biz names—i.e. Christina Aguilera—Shelton holds his own.

Belting out a decidedly un-Blakelike pop tune with his team of singers, and at six-foot-five towering over them as they dance, Shelton looks at ease. The song in question is Maroon 5's "This Love," which brings the band's singer and fellow *Voice* coach Adam Levine to his feet, clapping.

"Excellent song choice," Levine says, the roaring audience almost drowning him out.

Shelton celebrated his thirty-fifth birthday and tenth year as a recording artist in 2011. The process of shepherding Team Blake through *The Voice* brought an epiphany.

"I've realized after ten years that I do know a lot of stuff, whether I like it or not," he says, laughing. "I have turned into a wise old music pro man."

**M**ONTHS BEFORE SHELTON'S *Red River Blue* album saw daylight in mid-July, its first single, "Honey Bee," had already hit gold, selling half a million digital copies by Memorial Day weekend and later topping the country charts. Meanwhile, *The Voice*—which concluded in late June with Dia Frampton, whom Shelton mentored, the runner-up by a very slim margin—pulled in numbers so strong that NBC soon lined up Shelton, Levine, and fellow coaches Aguilera and Cee Lo Green for a second season.

The show's strong numbers, 12.2 million viewers in June, prompted the network to add an extra results show to the first season's slate and schedule not only a summer tour for the contestants but a second-season premiere to air after Super Bowl XLVI in February 2012.

"I always felt if the TV cameras discovered Blake, they would fall in love

**On July 20, *Red River Blue* became Blake Shelton's first number-one album after debuting at the top of the Billboard albums chart. The Ada native and Tishomingo resident is enjoying a meteoric spike in his country music career, fueled in part by his starring role on NBC's *The Voice*.**

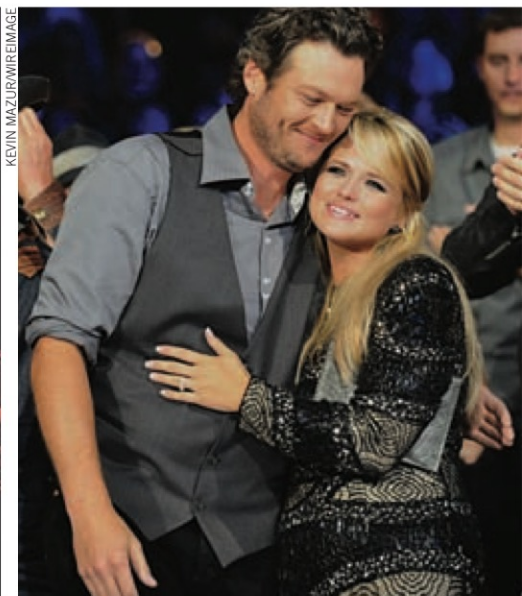
# BIRDS OF A FEATHER TWEET TOGETHER

## Blake Shelton does more than his fair share of tweeting.

Blake Shelton has a lot to say about his new wife, country siren Miranda Lambert, his hit show, *The Voice*, and his fondness for adult beverages. Luckily for his 600,000+ Twitter followers, the country heartthrob's need for self-expression isn't sated by songwriting alone. Since joining Twitter in May 2008, Shelton has tweeted more than eight thousand times. These are a few of our G-rated favorites. —KARLIE TIPTON

-  **WELL IT MAY** not come as a surprise but I'm floating around Lake Texoma fishing to celebrate this special #1 over all album. (July 20)
-  **DEAR NEW YORK** City, ...Shhhh!!!!!! (July 13)
-  **OK, ALTHOUGH I** can't really understand what they're saying, I'm almost certain that most Cajun music is about food... (July 2)
-  **WOKE UP IN** Louisiana.... There are people walking around the bus with lots of guns!! Either I've died and gone to heaven.. Or I'm about to!! (July 2)
-  **SO THE LONG** day of promoting "Red River Blue" begins. Good thing it's my favorite record so far.. It comes with M&Ms! Martina & Miranda!!! (July 1)
-  **IM SO EXCITED** it's my birthday I just did the ol' "Does this smell funny?" trick to Brad Paisley and pushed his head into a coconut pie... (June 18)
-  **HMMM...? CAN'T DECIDE** if I want to watch "The Antique Road Show" or squirt Listerine in my eyes... (June 2)
-  **ARE COPPER HEAD** snakes protected in Oklahoma? If so, I didn't just beat one to death repeatedly with a broom handle... (May 28)

PAUL NATKIN/WIREIMAGE  
JOHN JERNIGAN



KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

with him," says Nashville songwriter Bobby Braddock, Shelton's first producer. "He's so funny. He's got a great personality for TV."

Shelton cuts an impressive figure on stage and on camera, and his height advantage is only part of the equation. His curly mop of hair has been cut shorter over the years, but the piercing blue gaze remains unchanged. That gaze can be intense or mirthful, and the camera loves it either way.

So does NBC. Back on the West Coast, he posted this question on Twitter: "How in the hell did I end up living in LA for a month?!!!!"

Los Angeles is a long way from the wooded, silent majesty of Tishomingo, where heat hangs heavy in the trees even early in the summer. This was the heart of the Chickasaw Nation before state-

hood, and the warm-hued stones of the tribal capitol building were mined from a spot just outside town. Shelton and Lambert, who both live near Lake Texoma, seek refuge here whenever they can.

The two have ascended to a revered place in American pop culture: celebrity power couple. Their May wedding brought the kind of buzz normally reserved for Oscar-night wardrobes, and their glowing wedding portraits graced more than one magazine cover.

Shelton pens a lot of his own music—"I Can't Walk Away" from *Pure BS*, for example, and the sad and sensuous "Bare Skin Rug" he cowrote with Lambert—but nothing packs the punch of "Let's Grow Old Together," which he wrote for the wedding. He sang it before Lambert walked down

the aisle, and by all accounts, there were few dry eyes among the guests.

Yes, Blake and Miranda are big news. They may not be Brangelina or Johnny and June quite yet, but give them time.

Lambert was born in Texas, Shelton in Ada. Things are quiet down the road in Tishomingo.

"It's a small-town atmosphere, and life's a lot slower down here," he says. "What I need when I come in off the road or from LA to recharge is that type of atmosphere and that state of mind."

Growing up in Ada, Shelton was an outdoor kind of kid, recalls his father, Dick Shelton, who worked as a salesman as his son was growing up.

"Blake was busy from daylight till dark," Dick says. "I had to put in a PA system in the house so I could holler at him when it was time to come home."



SANFORD MYERS/ZUMA PRESS/CORBIS

Blake was the youngest of Dick and Dorothy Shelton's three children. His sister, Endy, was into dance and pageants. His brother Richie, who died in a car accident in 1990, grew up a Motocross champ.

In the middle of it was young Blake, always humming, always singing.

"I always loved music, even when I was very small," he says. "I don't even know where that came from. I mean, it wasn't like we grew up singing in

the living room as a family every night or anything."

His mother took an interest in his talent, and young Shelton took his first bows in front of an audience at a beauty pageant at around age eight.

Four or five years later, he decided to try his luck again, this time at a local country music festival. The boy came out on stage and blew them away.

"I was shocked," Dick Shelton says. "We had no idea he could sing."

**In May, Blake Shelton married fellow country superstar Miranda Lambert. His father, Dick Shelton, says, "I think he gave me the daughter-in-law of a lifetime."**

At fifteen, he was hired by the historic McSwain Theatre in Ada to play regular gigs. There, he met Mae Boren Axton—mother of singer-songwriter Hoyt Axton—who went to college in Ada and later taught there. She made a life in music, helped pen "Heartbreak Hotel" for Elvis Presley, and ushered a crop of talent to the forefront of the country music scene, including Willie Nelson and Reba McEntire.

One night, Axton was in the audience when Shelton took the stage. Afterward, she told him point blank that he had a shot at success if he'd move to Nashville and work at it. Two weeks after graduating from high school in 1994, he did.

“Twitter is fun because I can instantly have contact with my fans and talk to them and argue with them and laugh with them.”

—BLAKE SHELTON



Despite a red-hot career, Blake Shelton is still a down-home Oklahoman at heart. Says his father, Dick Shelton, "Blake is just Blake. When he's around us, he's as common as anybody can be. We lose track, really, of just how big he's become."



Blake Shelton holds his own in the name of country, performing on *The Voice* with fellow music powerhouses and show coaches Christina Aguilera, Adam Levine, and Cee Lo Green.



## “I always felt if the TV cameras discovered Blake, they’d fall in love with him.”

—BOBBY BRADDOCK

He was seventeen. No one in his family was surprised.

“I think it was just understood that when I graduated, that was my destiny,” he says.

Understood, perhaps, but that didn’t make it easy. The Shelton family drove him to his new life.

“It was like pulling teeth,” his father remembers. “It was hard to do.”

There were trusted people around, he says, which eased their minds. And calming too, perhaps, was the steady conviction that the boy would, after a few months, tire of the Nashville life and come home.

“But he sure fooled me,” his father chuckles. “He stuck it out.”

Blake Shelton toiled in obscurity for a while, piecing together a living between odd jobs and demo vocals. Then Bobby Braddock heard his voice over the phone.

**B**RADDOCK IS A songwriter, first and foremost. His work has been all over country music radio since the 1970s: “D-I-V-O-R-C-E,” “He Stopped Loving Her Today,” and other hits, more than thirty top tens in all. Now he was looking at going into the studio as a producer and bringing young talent with him. Songwriter Michael Kosser was telling him about a kid he’d heard, one he thought would be perfect. Kosser called Braddock one day to play him a demo over the phone.

“I said, ‘The song’s okay, but who’s that guy singing?’” Braddock says. “He said, ‘That’s the kid I was telling you about.’”

They got together and cut some songs, including one called “Austin.” Braddock took them to almost every label in town.

“The last one I went to was Giant,” Braddock says. “The reason that was the last one was because rumor had it Giant was going to fold.”

Giant did offer a deal, and the pair did accept. It took another three years for “Austin” to finally emerge as Shelton’s first single in 2001—and then Giant almost

immediately shut down. But deep in the Giant system, a promoter named Fritz Kuhlman saw the writing on the wall and decided to act.

“He knew Giant was going to fold,” Braddock says, “and he sent out a hundred copies to radio stations weeks before he was supposed to.”

By the time Giant closed, “Austin” was already on the country charts and would eventually spend five weeks at number one, even without a label behind it. That was enough to convince Warner Bros., which owned half of Giant Records and had the option to pick up its talent, to bring Shelton on board.

“It couldn’t have happened without it being a really powerful record,” Braddock says.

When Braddock was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in May 2011, the just-married Shelton and Lambert were on hand to serenade him with one of his own songs, “Golden Ring,” a hit for George Jones and Tammy Wynette in 1976. Braddock had seen the newlyweds less than two weeks before at their own wedding.

“I was just blown away that they would come to that,” he says. “It really, really touched me.”

Braddock was inducted with Reba McEntire and pioneering singer-songwriter Jean Shepard, both Oklahomans. McEntire’s husband and manager, Narvel Blackstock, brought Shelton into the family fold as they relaunched Starstruck Entertainment’s management division in 2006 with Blackstock’s son Brandon as Shelton’s manager. McEntire took an interest in Shelton’s career, the two of them appearing on stage together so often that the occasional fan has wondered if they are related.

She hovered by Shelton’s side early in the winnowing process on *The Voice*, doling out advice to competitors as they prepared to go one-on-one onstage. When it came to picking the winner of that duel, though, she smiled and shook her head.

“You’ve got a tough decision, Blake,” she said on the May 10 episode.

It might be almost too easy to suggest that Shelton, in his recent role as godfather/teacher/guru to his Team Blake fledglings, may simply be ensuring that the mentoring circle shall remain unbroken. But Shelton doesn’t dispute it.

“That’s fun for me, to see new artists and want to tell them things that have happened to me,” he says. “I don’t like being preached to, so I try not to do that. But I am open to them about advice, and I think they appreciate it.”

There’s always something new to learn, even for an old music pro like Shelton. Scott Hendricks, a fellow Okie born in Clinton, joined Warner Bros. Records Nashville in 2007 as head of its A&R department and took over producing duties for Shelton. They took their first bows together on *Pure BS* that same year.

“We can’t tell most of what all goes on in our sessions,” he says. “We laugh a lot.”

But Hendricks is quick to point out that Shelton is serious about his music, dead serious.

“He comes in, and he’s extremely prepared, which for a producer is a dream,” Hendricks says. “He knows the song better than I do.”

That work has paid off. Each successive Blake Shelton single rises to the top of the country chart almost like clockwork. His 2010 six-song experiments, *Hillbilly Bone* and *All About Tonight*, both saw their title tracks hit number one, 2011’s “Honey Bee” became his ninth number-one country single, and *Red River Blue* debuted—yes, debuted—at the top of the Billboard album chart. He hasn’t had a song peak outside the top ten since 2007.

Inevitably, the Grand Ole Opry came calling. That venerable shrine to country music, where a visitor can practically still hear the voices of Kitty Wells and Tex Ritter echoing through its spaces, broke its usual protocol when it came to Shelton.

Shelton’s *Hillbilly Bone* sidekick Trace Adkins brandished his phone after they performed together at the Opry’s “Country Comes Home” show in late September 2010.

“You know Blake is famous for doing the Twitter thing; he’s always sending tweets,” Adkins said. “Well, the Grand Ole Opry sent Blake a tweet tonight.”



LEWIS JACOBS/NBC

**Blake Shelton, here with Team Blake member and first season runner-up Dia Frampton, has embraced his mentoring role on *The Voice*. "It's very entertaining, but it's not just that," he says. "It's also about giving people a shot based on their talent and not anything else."**

As he handed the phone to Shelton, a tweet popped up: "@blakeshelton, you're invited to join the Grand Ole Opry. See you on 10/23/2010!"

Shelton immediately tweeted back: "Hmmm...Let me think...OK!!!!!!!"

Nobody, Blake Shelton included, gets to the Grand Ole Opry on his own. Like in any partnership, Hendricks says trust is key between artist and producer—but there are tests.

One of Hendricks' roles is to find the song that will push Shelton to the next level. In 2010, he had what he felt was the perfect one, a career-changer, and passed it along.

Late one night, Hendricks' phone rang. It was Shelton, who said he was parked on the side of the road with Lambert.

"She's bawling her eyes out," Shelton told him. "She heard this song."

He wanted to give it to her.

"It could change your career," Hendricks remembers telling him. "It'll be song of the year, I promise you."

That song, "The House That Built Me," did win song of the year at the 2011 Country Music Association Awards and again at the Academy of Country Music Awards—for Lambert.

"But you know what? It all worked out," Hendricks says. "The song found its right home, and I'm happy for Miranda."

**H**OME IS A frequent theme in country music. Recently, Shelton and McEntire banded together on behalf of fellow Oklahomans.

In mid-May, they staged a benefit concert in Durant to raise money for cleanup efforts in nearby Tushka, still reeling from an EF-3 tornado that tore through town the previous month. The first show sold out within hours, leading promoters to add a second one. It, too, sold out.

"The only thing better than raising two or three thousand dollars is raising five or six thousand," Shelton said beforehand.

In fact, the shows raised more than half a million dollars. That seems fitting for a guy who says coming home to Oklahoma was always in the cards.

"I never had plans of not living in Oklahoma," says Shelton. "I told my mom and dad when I moved to Nashville that

I wanted eventually to move back home one day, whether I made it in Nashville or not."

In 2006, after a dozen years there, he did move back.

"That's kind of how long it took me, you know?" he says, laughing. "But I made good on what I said."

Shelton has called a 1,200-acre spread near Tishomingo home since 2006, and Lambert has lived on the ranch next door for almost as long.

"When we were dating, she'd come up here and stay with me back in 2006 and 2007," says Shelton. "Way back then, she fell in love with Oklahoma. She bought property here after only visiting about three months on and off."

Shelton proposed in the woods on her property in spring 2010, having quietly secured her father's blessing beforehand. They toasted their engagement with plastic cups of rum and Diet Sprite.

Lambert, a Texan by birth, was raised in Lindale in east Texas.

"That's okay," says her father-in-law. "We're going to reform her."

The elder Shelton recalls his son as a boy, pulling on tennis shoes and a shirt, hopping on a three-wheeler, and roaring off. Some things haven't changed.

"When he gets home," Dick Shelton says, "I've seen him come in and get on his tractor and go out in the middle of the pasture and brush hog just to get away from the telephone and get off by himself for a while."

There's just something about Oklahoma, Blake Shelton knows firsthand, that brings people back and keeps them here.

"Look at Toby [Keith]," he says. "He's never been gone. Look at Garth—we're talking about Garth Brooks, who could live anywhere in the world he wants to, and he lives in Oklahoma. That says a lot about this place. There's just something about it. You can't be away for that long if you really have an understanding of this place and an appreciation for it." 🐾

*Blake Shelton's tour in support of Red River Blue continues through 2011. Season two of *The Voice* premieres on February 5 following Super Bowl XLVI on NBC. For an up-to-date tour schedule, visit [blakeshelton.com](http://blakeshelton.com).*