



The Lure of the Land

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By Anne Brewer

Nothing etches destinations forever in your memory bank better than getting a sense of the flora and fauna of an area. On your next trip along the Gulf Coast, get a visceral knowledge by including a day at a public home and garden. Here are three that are a must-see.

Roll out the good times in New Orleans where you can eat, drink, and jazz up your vacation. Near Metairie, turn onto Bamboo Road. and meander into the entrance court of Longue Vue House and Gardens, a quiet reserve of orchestrated natural beauty where great architecture and gardens meet. Epitomizing the hospitable spirit of New Orleans, Longue Vue was once a place where eminent politicians and celebrities congregated with the original owners, Edgar and Edith Stern.

A 1923 Colonial style home, Longue Vue was rebuilt after acquiring more land and finding the gardens no longer related to the house. The Sterns' renowned landscape architect, Ellen Biddle Shipman, introduced them to



architects William and Geoffrey Platt who designed the second house, a Classical Revival with a Louisiana Greek Revival influence. Custom built, this three-story house comprises forty-five rooms with impressive millwork of mahogany and birch; floors of brick, Brazilian rosewood, pine, and oak; and doors of Honduran mahogany. Ms. Shipman assisted the Sterns with the interior decorating using objects they acquired during an inspirational yearlong trip around the world in 1936-37. The Sterns were products of a significant period in landscape history, the Country Place Era, when wealthy industrialists traveled abroad and brought the “old world” style back to the states.

Reflecting the Sterns love of gardening, in addition to their global excursions, Shipman designed nine interconnecting garden “rooms” with 23 fountains encompassing European influences along with the historic characteristics of the walled kitchen garden and the landscapes of the Romantic Movement. With magnificent views from the house, the gardens appear to spill out from the house and flow, first formally then informally, throughout the eight acres. Using semi-tropical plants indigenous to Louisiana, Shipman created works of art with color, texture, and form. According to head gardener, Amy



Graham, “Of the six hundred gardens designed by Shipman, Longue Vue is said to be the most intact.”

Today, pursuant to the Sterns’ desires, Longue Vue serves as a public museum of decorative arts and garden exhibitions, providing educational programs for all ages. The furnishings, decorative objects, and textiles are the same as when the Sterns resided there, which includes one of the largest Creamware collections in the United States; and Graham has made use of extensive archives to perpetuate Shipman’s garden designs. Asked when the best time to visit, Administrative Director Ribby Fergusson replied, “We like to think anytime is a good time to visit Longue Vue”.

Heading east toward Mobile, stop off next in Theodore, Alabama for a reprieve on Fowl River at Bellingrath Gardens and Home. Purchased in 1917 as a fishing camp retreat for Coca Cola magnate, Walter Bellingrath, these 65 acres evolved into a magical woodland and garden paradise.

It all sprouted when Mrs. Bellingrath brought out a few azalea bushes to brighten the place. Her yard in Mobile could not contain her passion for collecting azaleas and camellias, and the fishing camp Bellecamp was the logical place for



the overflow. After going abroad in 1927, they returned deeply inspired to convert the fishing camp into a country estate, like those seen in Europe.

Architect George Rogers designed the house, a blending of cultures that once occupied Mobile. Although France and Spain flew their flags over Mobile too, Rogers called the design “English Renaissance.” Today, it houses the original furnishings and extensive collections of decorative objects while the converted three-car garage holds the largest collection of Boehm porcelain in the United States.

Assisting with the landscape design, Rogers used large azaleas and camellia bushes to line the two-mile serpentine path, creating a sense of anticipation and surprise as the pathways open up to the verdant Great Lawn, the Rose garden, Mirror Lake, the Butterfly garden, and the garden terraces. Each season is celebrated with show-stopping displays of riotous color. Azaleas abound in blazing shades of cherry red, candy pink, and sunset lavender, ringing in spring. In summer, fragrance from the award-winning rose garden wafts throughout the area beckoning the visitor to come see its display. Linger longer as you cool down by the Grotto and other water features.



Autumn is a cornucopia of trailing chrysanthemums of burnished hues everywhere you turn. Tumbling out of window boxes and off balconies, hanging from the rustic bridge where they reflect off Mirror Lake, and pouring off the Grotto, the chrysanthemums are a Thanksgiving feast for your eyes. Winter is bejeweled with regal camellias of numerous varieties, some the size of dessert plates. During Christmas, they have a breath-taking festival of lights-a truly dazzling winter wonderland.

Bellingrath isn't all show as their mission is to educate and instill the love of nature and gardening in all who visit. With a calendar of events on the website, you can schedule your visit to include a program.

Keep cruising eastward on I-10 or Hwy. 98, past Destin to Point Washington, Florida. Take a left on County Road 395 and see what old North Florida used to look like at Eden State Gardens. Under the canopy of the live oaks is the restored 1897 Classical Revival home of William Wesley, a lumberman. This same serene site was once a bustling mill town.

Over time, the last of Wesley's descendents sold the house and property to a single woman, Lois Maxon, who restored it, then willed it to the state in memory of her parents. The house-turned-museum holds a large collection of



Maxon's Louis XVI furniture and heirlooms. Maxon was responsible for turning the grounds to its present contemplative state, bordering on Tucker Bayou where impressive live oaks dripping with Spanish moss are worth the visit to see. The fern-blanketed limbs gracefully stretch toward the rose and butterfly gardens kept by The Friends of Eden, a volunteer organization made up of gardeners.

Varieties of camellias and azaleas, along with magnolias, gardenias and hydrangeas inhabit the place, creating a wildlife sanctuary. Where the other two sites are places to see and do, Eden State Gardens is a place to bring a picnic and simply be.

The land captivated not only the souls and dreams of the original owners but continues to lure us today by offering much needed respite. Rejuvenate your heart and soothe your soul with a tour of these showpiece homes, verdant manicured grounds, and various colorful gardens. You, too, will reluctantly leave the Gulf Coast inspired to reacquaint yourself with your own home and backyard in a soulful way.



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Longue Vue
#7 Bamboo Rd.
New Orleans, La.
Open Mon. - Sat. 10:00am-4:30pm
Sunday 1:00pm-5:00pm
www.longuevue.com

Bellingrath
12401 Bellingrath Gardens Rd.
Theodore, Al.
Open Daily 8:00am-5:00pm
www.bellingrath.org

Eden State Gardens
181 Eden Garden Rd.
Point Washington, Fl.
Open: House tours Thursday- Monday 9:00am-3:00pm
Grounds and gardens- daily 8:00-sundown
www.edenstategardens.com

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