



Favorite Plantation: Houmas House

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- Louisiana Plantations



When you look past the dramatic oak alley and beyond the white columns of the main building of **Houmas House Plantation and Gardens**. When you leave all that is pretty much as expected at the front gate, and you come across a hilltop Japanese tea house, a stream cascading down that hill and under a wooden bridge. Then on to a nearby ball room with a genuine Confederate submarine hanging on the back wall, and an owner who can't stop talking about the "puptuals" of the century...well, you quickly realize there's more than hoop skirts and mint juleps on the veranda, to the story of this plantation house and its grounds.

This is Houmas House Plantation, which owner Kevin Kelly bought for a mere \$3 million after an ex-girlfriend pointed it out to him in the classified advertising section of a newspaper in 2003.

This is also the same Kevin Kelly who, when he lived on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans, told Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates that he would just have to hold his party somewhere else and not in the Kelly domicile, and who is so incredibly busy on his myriad projects that he reports he once left his contact lenses in without removing them...for three years.

A bearded bear of a man, Kelly zips around his sprawling plantation acreage in Darrow, just south of Baton Rouge, in a golf cart: up the hill toward the teahouse, over a narrow bridge, over a gravel path...all seemingly without looking where he's going.

All the while he keeps up a nonstop narrative about how it took "many millions more than I paid for it" to turn a tired old River Road lady into an oasis of elegance for dining, meetings and weddings, "...up to seventy-five weddings a year right now," he says without taking a breath.

That quickly segues Kelly into the story of the "grandest wedding of all" that he tied into the big grand re-opening celebration he held back in 2003: the marriage of his two dogs, King Sam and Princess Grace Kelly.

"It was fantastic," Kelly says. "We even had lawyers representing King Sam and Princess Grace. They signed 'pre-puptuals'...Everybody thought I had lost my mind, but that wedding made 176 newspapers. King Sam's gone now...but he and Grace left us five puppies. My mom kept two of the puppies. Did I tell you my mom lives in a garconniere here on the grounds? I built a wing onto it for her."

Not your ordinary plantation indeed. Nor your ordinary plantation owner.

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