

Lysa Allman-Baldwin

One of the South's oldest and most beautiful plantation estates, and billed as the "Crown Jewel of Louisiana's River Road," **Houmas House Plantation and Gardens** is an adventure unto itself.

The property's first inhabitants were indigenous Houmas Indians and around the mid-1700's it slowly transformed into a sugar plantation. Flourishing under several owners during the next century, it came to be recognized as a monumental sugar producer. At that time, the enterprise was manned by Black slave laborers from the surrounding area—today's Hillaryville neighborhood in Ascension Parish, which is still primarily African American.

When I last visited, the proprietor was in the midst of plans to add lodging accommodations, but the property is so stunning and holds so much history, that I didn't want to leave it out of this feature.

The property now currently the original French Provincial house and a 21-room mansion, a tour of which reveals the wealth of antique period furnishings, 1800's-era serving tableware, art, artifacts and more that reflect the grandeur of Houmas House in its heyday.

The mansion's real claim to fame is as the movie set for Bette Davis in the film, "Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte," the room where Davis stayed still preserved as it was in 1963.

Today, in addition to the original home and mansion, visitors also enjoy two restaurants, a theater and gift shop, all situated amidst 38 lush acres overflowing with towering 200-year old oak trees, exotic formal gardens, fountains, lagoons and ponds.

