

# L.A. to N.O.LA



## Houmas House

My more romantic ideas about the South include beautiful plantations and women in hoop skirts. I get it now that the cost of many of those plantations was slavery, but the child in me who loves stories of princesses and castles attaches to the grandeur and elegance of those porch-swirled manor homes and their fan-wielding inhabitants. This weekend, I attended a bridal shower/ladies tea at [Houmas House](#) in Darrow, LA and got a taste of a culture passed from mother's to daughters for centuries.

Houmas House was first a large property given to the Houmas Indians in a land grant. They sold the land in the mid 1700's and a French Provincial house was erected then later eclipsed by the antebellum mansion called "*The Sugar Palace*" built in front of it from 1810 to 1828. At it's height, the plantation produced 20 million pounds of sugar a year. A flood in 1927 and the Great Depression of 1929 sent the farm into disrepair and it fell to waste until 1940 when New Orleanian Dr. George B. Crozat bought the property as a Summer home and eventually opened it to tourism. The mansion's 16 rooms include the preserved furnishings of the room used by Bette Davis while filming "*Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte*" on the now 38 acre property.

There are the giant Live Oaks with their swooping boughs you'd expect to see, but the many gardens are filled with exotic flowers. Giant butterflies and dragonflies light on the year round blooms. There are even women wandering the property wearing hoop skirts while giving tours to visitors sipping mint juleps.

Though the restaurant and dining hall have great reputations for tasty food, not content with lunch, dinner, Sunday brunch and the many weddings and events held there, Houmas House has recently begun serving tea. We were seated in the tiny building behind the Mansion which may have housed the house servants, the kitchen or both (I never asked). We were offered a selection of Earl Grey, darjeeling or green tea served with a variety of sweeteners including organic cane sugar. Since I'd seen local honey in the gift shop and spotted hives behind the fence, I wished I'd had the sweet treat with my tea but I don't remember it being offered. I'm also a big fan of mint tea, which is not only naturally caffeine-free, but more refreshing as a hot tea on a hot day.

Then came the navy blue plates of finger sandwiches. There was the traditional open-faced cucumber sandwich with a dill cream spread, a cajun caviar on creme fraiche, a super-tasty turkey watercress and a decadent brie with kumquat sandwich. I savored each fussy, crust-trimmed bite.

The next plate offered a spear of asparagus wrapped in smoked salmon, a perfectly cooked, tender, pink shrimp on a water cracker, a duck dish in a tiny hollowed-out biscuit and a scalloped pastry cup filled with chicken salad and topped with mango/avocado chutney. Yum.

Next up were 2 full-sized fruited scones offered with strawberry jam, Devonshire whipped cream and an lick-your-plate-good lemon curd. I can only hope that they offer it by the tub in the gift shop by my next visit. And last came the pretty plate of desserts; a chocolate dipped strawberry, a petit four, an airy creme puff and a small tart filled with stiff whipping cream and fruit.

The entire experience was elegant and filled with beauty while remaining cozy. Not only was it a perfect venue to celebrate a young woman's upcoming nuptials, I pictured returning with my 84 year old aunt, Norma, or bringing a girlfriend from L.A. for an afternoon of fancy feminine fun and food.