



## **Holiday at Houmas House**

**Ascension Parish plantation the perfect setting for formal cuisine or a leisurely winter afternoon**

By Cheer Coen

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Now that the holidays are among us, life becomes a juxtaposition of warm celebration and high-strung insanity.

If you need a respite from the stress and want to indulge in old-fashioned Christmas cheer, try Latil's Landing Restaurant at Houmas House plantation on River Road in Ascension Parish. It's about an hour and a half from Lafayette, just past Baton Rouge, and makes an ideal day trip.

The historic plantation, built in the 1770s by Alexander Latil, has been lovingly restored by businessman Kevin Kelly of New Orleans, who has spared no expense on the house, elaborate gardens and entertainment pavilions. The home contains period furniture, artwork and items used by the plantation owners of the day, including a gorgeous antique billiard table and a magnificent Mallard bed. The gardens include fountains and ponds with swans and koi, 500-year-old live oak trees, flowers and vine-covered walkways.



**Houmas House plantation in Ascension Parish near Gonzales has dining options to suit every taste, including entrees and other menu items catered for the holiday season. Submitted photo**

Now, through the end of the year, you can tour the 230-year-old house and gardens in all its holiday dress. But while you're enjoying the trip to Christmases past, be sure to stop and sample the exquisite food of Executive Chef Jeremy Langlois.

The more informal Café Burnside offers lunch daily from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. in the plantation's Pavillon, with brick walls containing remnants of a cotton warehouse built by the Princess of Monaco in 1883 and the windows open to the gardens and fountains. Langlois' signature soups are offered here, as well as salads, red beans and rice, po-boys and a charbroiled filet mignon.

The formal Latil's Landing exists within the original house, directly behind the plantation, and the now covered passageway that exists between. Diners eat off china that duplicates the original French Limoges pattern of the house and are surrounded by antiques, artwork and wood-burning fireplaces. The Red Room, for instance, contains the original wood floors and beams, cypress mantel and a portrait of Latil watching over it all.

Diners can enjoy an evening meal Wednesday through Saturdays, and each night, Langlois creates a seven-course menu for \$80. Brunch and dinner is offered on Sundays.

Whatever you choose, don't miss the outstanding chicken and andouille gumbo and the ingenious bisque of curried pumpkin, crawfish and corn, a perfect blend of flavors to take the chill off and get you in the holiday mood. For appetizers, the sweet potato gnocchi contains crawfish croutons, bacon and a white truffle cream that's to die for.

Entrees range from lobster and Creole tomato risotto -- papaya-stuffed lobster, fire-roasted shrimp and crawfish tails on a Creole tomato risotto with Parmesan broth -- to the trademark Rack of Lamb Burnside -- lamb that's been marinated in Community Coffee and served with creamed potatoes, delicate vegetables and a merlot demi-glace.

Save room for dessert because everything is good here. The Bananas Foster Split takes caramelized bananas topped with homemade vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, pecans and the traditional flaming sauce. The apple galette tops a flaky apple pastry with Crème Anglaise, mint syrup and vanilla ice cream.

Langlois creates his own ice cream with fresh cream and milk and, for something unique, he substituted the milk with zinfandel wine to top a chocolate panacota that's accented with a berry compote and oh, so good.

The old cistern house has been converted into a wine cellar filled with 1,500 bottles of fine champagnes and wines, so finding the right wine is a given. Cocktails and signature drinks, such as the plantation's own mint julep with mint grown on the property, can be purchased in the converted garconniere to the right of the property, called the Turtle Bar. Drinks can be enjoyed throughout the gardens, too, if a tour of the house and a relaxing afternoon is more your style.

However you choose to enjoy Houmas House and Langlois' fabulous creations, you can't go wrong. And the peace and solitude the lovely setting allows make it doubly enjoyable this time of year.

### **If you go:**

Latil's Landing is open 6-10 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and 2-9 p.m. Sunday. Reservations are required; call (225) 473-9380 or (888) 323-8314. Private dining rooms are available.

Tours are available 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday and Tuesday and 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Cost is \$20 for mansion and gardens or \$10 for gardens and grounds only.

**To get there:**

Take Interstate 10 east to Gonzales and turn off at Exit 182, then turn right onto La. 22. Travel several miles, past the turnoff to Donaldsonville and the Cajun Village, to La. 44, then turn left and proceed less than half a mile to River Road. Turn right at the levee and look for the entrance to Houmas House Plantation and Gardens about half a mile down the road -- just at the end of the white fence that spans the front of the property.

For more information, visit [HoumasHouse.com](http://HoumasHouse.com).

**Filmed there:**

Some of the films and TV shows shot at Houmas House include:

Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte, 1964

Longstreet TV series, 1971-72

Moon of the Wolf, 1972

Mandingo, 1975

A Closer Walk, 1976

All My Children, 1981

K'ville (FOX pilot and first episode), 2007