

# VICTORIANA

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## Houmas House Plantation and Gardens

Houmas House Plantation and Gardens is a refurbished 21-room mansion situated on 36 acres on the Mississippi River. It offers visitors a unique, historical glimpse into the resplendent world of Southern Plantation life and the days of glory for what was once Louisiana's biggest sugar cane plantation.

In 1770, Alexander Latil built the original house on land purchased from the Houmas Indians who occupied the region; thirty years later he sold it to Wade Hampton who named the property "*Houmas House*" after the Indians. In 1825, Col. John Preston and his wife Caroline, son-in-law and daughter of Hampton, took over the property. By 1840, construction of the current mansion was completed. In 1858, the Preston's sold the house and 12,000 acres for \$1 million to Irishman John Burnside, one of the nations leading sugar producers, and to this day, the home is sometimes referred to as the "*Burnside House*."

Currently there are thirty-eight acres, sixteen of which are maintained as the formal grounds to the mansion. Houmas House once boasted 300,000 acres total and during its sugar-producing heyday in the 1860s the plantation had 98,000 acres under cultivation. Special events at Houmas House Plantation and Gardens are truly memorable, from the small picnic or intimate dinner party to a grand reception, large corporate outing or family reunion.

In November 2003, Houmas House Plantation and Gardens opened to the general public after an extensive renovation, enhancement and restoration to the gardens, home and surrounding property. Houmas House owner Kevin Kelly, also a real estate developer and preservationist, purchased the house in May 2003.

"Purchasing Houmas House was a project I have always dreamed about," said Kelly. "I am excited to re-open the property to Louisianians and travelers that come from all over the world to explore plantation life. Houmas House has been revamped to showcase the best parts of its history and our tour guides are ready to tell the exciting stories of its past."

The French House, built in the 1770's by Alexander Latil, and now the rear wing of the Houmas House Mansion, boasts the Latil's Landing Restaurant. This 230 year old house, complete with original beamed ceilings, cypress mantels, wood burning fireplaces, and original wood floors, is set between the Garden Carriageway and the Hampton Fountain and Gardens. Along with a museum quality collection of art and artifacts, each dining experience is accented by French Limoge china and dinner service, replicated from the originals of Houmas House, first created for Wade Hampton in the 1830s.

Highlights from the grounds and gardens include two symmetrical octagonal *garçonnières* – structures unique to Louisiana plantations to house the adolescent sons of the plantation owners. There are also massive fountains, lagoons and an original alley of oak trees more than 200 years old. The well-tended flower beds feature exotic flowers including camellias, crepe myrtles, roses, azaleas, irises, water lilies and cypress and oak trees.

Highlights from the interior of the house include a mural scene featuring sugar cane fields painted by Craig Black, the present day caretaker, a self-taught artist. Many River Road plantations featured murals, including a nearby neighbor with an African mural motif (lions, etc.) that was reportedly so realistic it frightened some guests.

Also showcased is a rare 1848 Louisiana Census Map given to Col. John Preston, former owner of Houmas House, found hidden in the attic for more than 140 years and an antique set of original Paris porcelain china serving pieces from 1848 with the "Houmas House" name.

Since the property reopened to the public, the riverboat, the Delta Queen, is making regular stops to allow guests to tour the house and grounds. The Delta Queen pulls into the levee and lowers the gangplank just like over a century ago. Film and television productions filmed on location include the 1964 *Hush*, *Hush Sweet Charlotte*, 1975 *Mandingo*, 1988 *Fletch Lives*, 2007 *K-Ville*, and 2010 *Revenge of the Bridesmaids*.

Houmas House Plantation and Gardens is open on Monday and Tuesday, 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. and Wednesday through Sunday, 9 a.m. until 8 p.m. is located at 40136 Highway 942 River Road, Darrow, Louisiana, four miles from I-10 between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. **Web site:** [www.houmashouse.com](http://www.houmashouse.com)