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Getaway: Staying in the past

Spending a night at Maison Bocage is like sleeping in a museum

by *Cheré Coen*

Spending a romantic evening or weekend at Bocage Plantation near Darrow is a pleasure in its own right — the 1837 Creole cottage-style mansion sits on 110 acres along the River Road amidst massive oak trees and magnolias, an historic trip back in time.

Dr. Marion Rundell, a native of Pineville who now lives in Houston, has lovingly restored the plantation. Rundell purchased Bocage — which means “Shady Retreat” — in 2008 and opened the home as a bed and breakfast last fall. Future plans call for extensive gardens and using the location for weddings, meetings, luncheons and other special events.

The lagniappe of Bocage is Rundell’s collection of fine antiques. For years he collected and warehoused exquisite pieces in Houston, and now he has the perfect location to showcase these antiques, many of which are museum quality.

And the beauty of it all is he wants visitors to relax and enjoy them. No ropes over chairs, no admonishments for peeping through the ancient secretaries and armoires.

The room I enjoyed included a three-quarter tester bed by Prudent Mallard accented by an empire mahogany armoire circa 1840 and a marble top dresser by Alexander Roux. A Waterford chandelier hung overhead, and floor-to-ceiling windows offered views of the front porch and river and the vast countryside to the plantation’s north.

The Colomb Blue Room offers a three-quarter tester bed by Charles Lee and a fabulous wig cabinet, a Thomas Sully portrait and a Rosewood desk, all circa 1840. A royal Italian ebony bed is the focal point of the male-oriented Venetian Room with matching armoire and secretary, all inlaid with rosewood and ivory.

All bedrooms offer modern baths, some with foot-claw tubs, crystal chandeliers and steam showers. Rooms include flat screen HDTVs as well.

A bottle of wine and a choice of shrimp cocktail or chocolate-covered strawberries greet guests upon arrival or as a late-afternoon snack. Visitors can sip their wine on antique wicker rockers on the front porch alongside Miss Kitty, the resident cat who loves to sleep in the porch’s wicker cradle, while the sun slips behind the oak trees casting an orange glow.

Breakfast consists of several courses of delectable fare — hot biscuits with fresh strawberry jam, fruit served in crystal glasses, pecan French toast with Steens syrup, fresh scrambled eggs with cheese and crispy bacon, all served on Rundell’s antique china service with silverware and crystal on an antique dining room set. And, of course, there’s plenty of orange juice and hot Louisiana-style coffee.

Prices for rooms begin at \$200 per night, and tours are offered for \$10 per person. Bocage Plantation is located at the end of Highway 44, one of the exits off Interstate 10 near Gonzales. Houmas House is conveniently located just a skip down River Road, giving visitors an excellent place to enjoy dinner at Latil's Landing Restaurant.

Baton Rouge and Gonzales are close enough for a quick trip for shopping, movies and other dining prospects, but if you're truly in for a "shady retreat," stick to the River Road, enjoy sunset walks along the levee where horses roam or sit on the front porch and read a good book. Like everything else at Bocage, the house is full of great reading materials, and it's all there for you to enjoy.
