



For all
life's seasons

ONE OF THE MOST **BEAUTIFUL GARDENS IN NATCHEZ**
IS GEARED TO BOTH HISTORIC- AND SELF-PRESERVATION

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t The pilgrims flock to Natchez, Mississippi, for its two main home-and-garden tours—one in the spring, when the azaleas and dogwoods pop, and then in the autumn, when holly and fall-blooming camellias put on a show. It's during these cooler seasons that the historic Mississippi River town's usually high temperatures and even higher humidity moderate, allowing the grounds—and homeowners—to exhale a bit in the sultry surroundings. One downtown garden, though, aims for year-round sighs. "Only enjoy this place twice a year? No way," says garden owner Bob Barnes.

His garden's first designer must have felt the same back in 1836. When Bob and his wife, Bettina, bought the dilapidated property decades ago, they and their five daughters spent many a weekend, shovels in hand, uncovering evidence of what their

grounds' original owners had wisely chosen: plants that wouldn't wilt, wither, and perish—like boxwood, crape myrtle, and camellias—in a climate that not only stayed very hot for a very long time but also might drop into a deep freeze.

At first, the Barneses' garden moves were choreographed by legendary Southern designer Earl Hart Miller (who also helped design their home's interiors). Later, after a devastating freeze wiped out much of their early accomplishments, they worked with renowned landscape architects Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan of Atlanta.

"When we began the excavation, we dug down and found a circular bed where the fountain is now, and there were planter beds around the perimeter, similar to the design we chose," Bob says. "We saw a lot of elements that suggested what type of garden would have been here when the house was built. That



Opposite: The brick-walled back garden features a fountain at one end and Chinese parasol trees that tower above autumn azaleas, holly, lantana, bay magnolias, liriope, and sago palms.

Above: The front garden, which gets the most sun, features sculpted boxwoods and potted plants. The design is similar to that of the original 1836 garden, which the Barneses and their five daughters uncovered shortly after they bought the property. **Left:** Bettina and Bob admire a water hyacinth with Bird, their African Gray parrot. **Right:** The back fountain, with native water plants, uses various pieces found on the couple's travels. **Preceding pages:** The fountain in the front garden is anchored by an Italian cast-bronze crane surrounded by water papyrus, lilies, and hyacinths. At the base are alternating pots of Blue Daze flowers and chrysanthemums.





Left: A pergola's 50-year-old wisteria vine is mixed with honeysuckle for year-round blooms. A Mexican stone vase on the terrace table holds colorful *Canna indica* leaves.

Above: Natchez crape myrtle adds to the beauty of the Barneses' landscape.

Below: Inside the walled garden, a bench nestles under a canopy of trees.



was an era when plant explorers brought back strange new plants from all over the world. Dr. Haller Nutt, one of our local cotton planters, procured a lot of our plants in Asia, and they've adapted well to our extreme conditions." The Barneses continue to use such plants, including camellias, azaleas, and varnish trees, which have been some of the most important plants in this area for at least a century, Bob says.

The plantings underscore what thrives in the Zone 8b region. To keep the garden vibrant, Bob opts for foliage plants, with flowering shrubs underplanted with annuals changed out seasonally in the three main garden "living rooms." These include the front-facing English-style boxwood garden, clearly visible from the street, and the two more private, lush realms behind old brick walls to the side and rear of the house. The couple enjoy their well-manicured property for aesthetic reasons, but they also

have used it as a stress reliever—Bob is a surgeon, Bettina a child psychologist (both now retired). But in 1992, they found even more comfort in their garden. That was the year that one of their daughters, Lee Barnes—acclaimed New Orleans cooking teacher and mother of three—lost her life to a brain tumor at age 41. Since then, the garden has evolved into a more spiritual place of calm, and in it, their family has never been closer.

"During such times in life, you certainly get your priorities straight," says Bob. "You quickly realize what's most important in life." For the Barneses, that now means going on missionary trips in this country and abroad to help people with medical needs. And through helping others, "life blooms in meaningful ways," Bob says.

He takes pride in tending to some 300 to 400 cattleya hybrid orchids and spends his early dawn hours working with them ►



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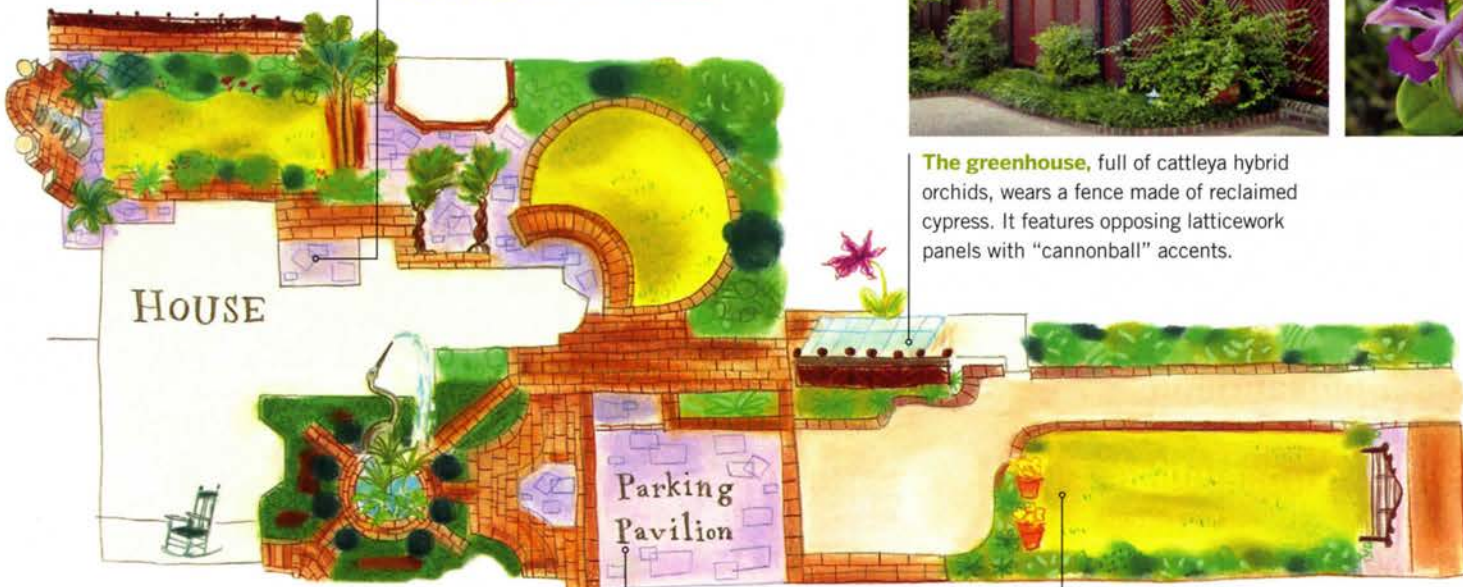
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The patio adjacent to the dining room wears a boa of ivy. Beneath, a console table welcomes clivia and orchids, while allamanda peeks out from its pot.



The greenhouse, full of cattleya hybrid orchids, wears a fence made of reclaimed cypress. It features opposing latticework panels with "cannonball" accents.



A parking pavilion lets light reach sago palms, agapanthus, indigo, liriopie, maidenhair fern—and, of course, Bird.



The side lawn, with a bench for relaxation, plays host to perennials, annuals, and tropicals. In the foreground is a row of potted chrysanthemums.



in the greenhouse. "That's when it's cool, and the only thing I hear are the birds," he says. After the sculptural blooms have been coaxed open, Bettina showcases them indoors, in small pots collected during their travels. "We keep orchids everywhere," she says. "The scents they offer can be delightful."

Sitting outside on an early fall afternoon, Bettina and Bob reflect on how at peace they are—both with the land's transformation, and their own. "Sometimes I think I enjoy the garden more than he does," Bettina says with a mischievous smile. "We'll be relaxing, like we are now, and I'll think, 'Ah, this is heaven.' And he'll say, 'Look, there's a weed.'"

Bob chuckles and gives her a wink. "A good gin martini usually helps take care of that, my dear." ❧

Landscape designers: Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan

For more information, see sources on page 129



An impressive stone snail stands guard on a brick pinth.