

Sneak Peek at Chene Vert Estate

~Story by Ron Betzer

One of the convention tour stops during next years SLI convention will take us to an extraordinary estate in Baton Rouge. Owned by Dr. Wayne Stromeyer and his wife Cheryl, the 11 acre plot is a remnant of an early Spanish land grant and is an appropriate site for an early 19th century creole house that was relocated from its original location in the Opelousas/Washington area (25 miles north of Lafayette). The house, deteriorating and unoccupied for about 35 years, was moved to Baton Rouge in 1991 and restored as closely as possible to the period while making allowances for modern utilities. The house was called "Live Oak" by the locals in its original location and the Stromeyers have renamed it Chene Vert, the French idiom for "Live Oak" (literally "green oak" or "evergreen oak").

The property already had a 19th century Acadian type house, constructed of cypress with mud and moss walls and sitting on cypress logs. It now serves as a guest house. The interiors of both homes are furnished with period furniture.

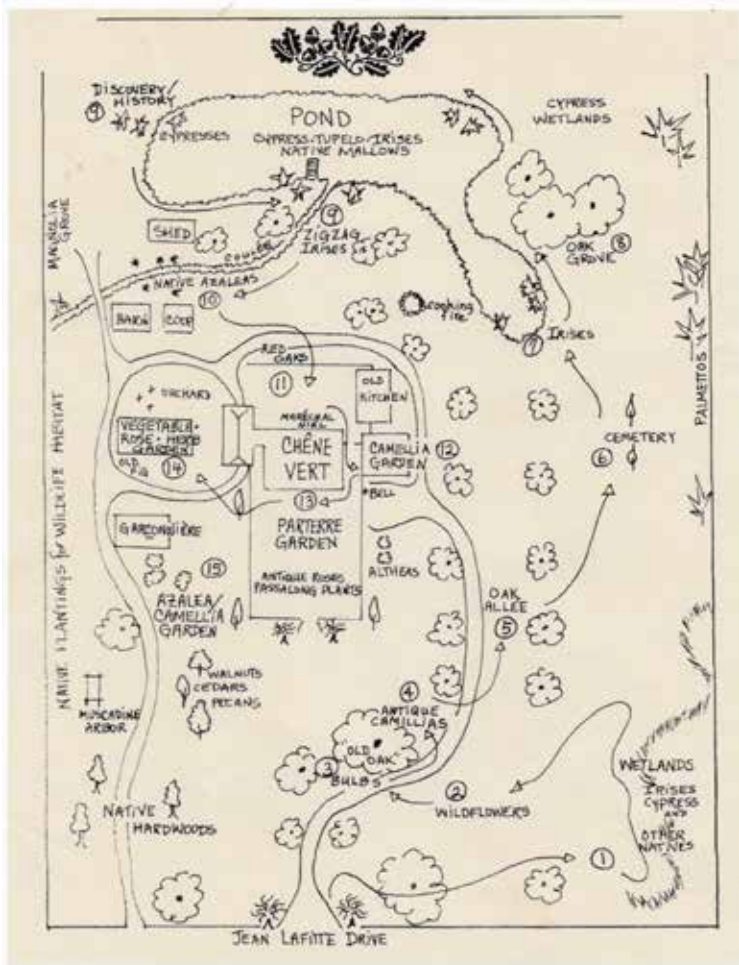
Prior to the relocation, the property was prepared for the arrival of the house and ever since there's been a continuing effort to populate the land with plant life that would have been seen in that period. The house's original site, a sugar and cotton plantation, revealed masses of daylilies, narcissus, and jonquils, crinum lilies, four o'clocks, and parrot gladioli and many were moved from the old site to enhance the restored gardens. Trees, bushes and plants appropriate for the site have been sourced from many locations.

Chene Vert's parterre garden is an extension of the house's restoration, the formal design is partially based on an 1847 New Orleans Notarial Archives drawing of a garden in New Orleans. Located directly in front of the house in the French manner, the parterre is arranged in geometric designs, bordered by yaupon hedges. Antique roses and "pass-along plants" form the heart of this garden.

The remaining property contains equally interesting plantings as detailed in the map and its accompanying detail of points of interest. You will notice several references to Louisiana irises. Almost all are collected old, non-hybridized varieties. This write-up does not do this property justice. It must be seen to be believed. However, please note that nly the grounds will be opened to us, not the homes. Dr. Stromeyer intends to be available as a guide for those who choose to follow him around the estate.

Want To Contribute to "A Few Favorites"?

The *Fleur* is seeking readers to contribute to a regular "Few Favorites" feature. Just pick out 3-5 of your favorite Louisiana irises and write a bit about why you like them. If you have pictures, great, but we have access to photos of most recent cultivars. The text can be brief (one to two pages is perfect) and that can include the pictures. Feel free to contribute notes and observations, and the *Fleur* staff will work with you to fit text into available space. The idea is to get more input from readers and present more information on popular Louisiana irises. Just email the Editor and attach text and pictures, preferably in a Word file, or to get more information.



1. Wetland area – Twenty-five years ago this area was packed with tallow trees, willows and weeds. Repeated clearing and plantings of native trees, especially cypress, with some maples, sycamores and oaks, has been followed by spontaneous growth of ash and elm trees and smaller plants such as the native ferns and spiderworts. More recent introductions such as the irises, cattails, sweet bay magnolias, native hollies and red bay are expected to proliferate in this compatible environment.

2. Wildflower field – A showy canvas is often seen in this planting of a native seed mixture from a regional nursery.

3. Bulbs – snowdrops, paperwhites and narcissus are the dominant bulbs, but a few groups of white byzantine gladioli make a rare, historic statement. There are old camellias and a stand of Louisiana irises beneath the big oak.

4. Antique camellias – This stand is about 7 years old and represents varieties mostly from the late 1800's.

5. Oak Alley – Many of the old Louisiana houses had such alleys

6. Cemetery – The iron crosses mark a potential site for a traditional appearing family cemetery. Cedar trees often marked burial sites.

7. Pond, Irises – This portion of the pond is a good point from which to explore native irises. On the right are several varieties of Louisiana blues (*giganticaerulea*), on the left several Louisiana whites. Most of these are collected, old, non-hybridized varieties. Scattered *Iris fulva* emerge beneath the large cypress trees on the right.

8. Cheniere – A cheniere is more typically a coastal, elevated portion of land consisting of dirt, sand and seashells surrounded by marshland. Live oaks can typically grow on this elevated land due to its drainage properties. "Mini-cheniere" might be a good term to describe the elevated mounds here with live oaks thriving adjacent to wetlands.

9. Zig-Zag iris (*Iris Brevicaulis*) – This iris needs more drainage than the others and tends to grow on higher ground. It is a later bloomer, usually May.

10. Coulee – A collection of native azaleas, viburnums, mayhaws, fringe trees, starbushes and others may be in bloom.

11. Backyard, work area, kitchen – This area features the old kitchen, the rare Marechal Niel yellow rose, the old water filter, water lilies in the old sugar kettle and some tropicals.

12. Antique camellia garden – Fifty camellias from the late 1700's to early 1800's populate this formal side parterre and its green planter boxes.

13. Main Parterre – The principal formal garden. Antique roses and pass-along plants are featured.

14. Kitchen garden – Boxed groupings of vegetables occupy the center while climbing old roses dot the periphery

15. Antique azalea and camellia garden – A collection of azaleas and camellias from the 1800's.