

It's the Tops



WITH ITS SUPERLATIVE DÉCOR, FOOD AND LIVE AUCTION, "SENTIMENTAL JOURNEYS" UPS THE ANTE ON FUND-RAISERS.

By Sue Strachan



Left: The Spirit of Cambodia dancers greeted guests when they arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. C. Allen Favrot, where the pre-gala wine tasting was held.

Photographed by Eugenia Uhl



Above: Wineries set up in a tent outside the Favrot home to make sampling easier at the pre-gala wine tasting.

Left: For "Sentimental Journeys," an ordinary tent was transformed into a glamorous 1940s Hollywood setting. Draped silver-blue fabric, metal palm trees painted white, and white coral-shaped chandeliers enhanced the look.



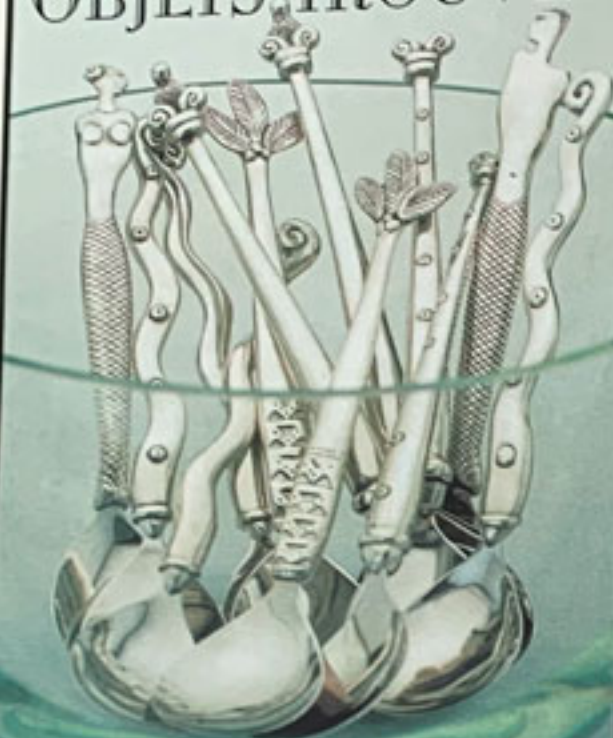
the core is an unflagging support for Longue Vue, a historic estate built by Edith and Edgar Stern from 1939 to 1942, and altered throughout their ownership. The gardens are probably best known for the work done on them by noted landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman. They were opened to the public in 1968, while the house went on view in 1980. Alas, like most historic places, funds are always needed for maintenance, restoration and development.

So it was in 1995 that Longue Vue's development committee decided that a deluxe travel auction would be a unique way to raise money. The first "SJ" chairmen—Barbara Bush, Donna Hines, Mary Clements and Gloria Kabacoff—along with design chairmen Sally Koch, came up with the idea of naming the fund-raiser "Sentimental Journeys" after the memoirs of a trip taken by the Stern family in 1936 and 1937 to Europe and the Middle East.

The first "SJ" was a success, and is now held every 18 months, the amount of time needed to secure donations

Dutch florist Marcel Wolterinck's floral arrangements in white highlighted with greenery were lush and elegant, especially when filling a chic variety of containers.

OBJETS TROUVÉS



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Artist Gretchen Howard not only painted decorative panels that were spaced out along the tent's perimeter, she also stenciled the floors.

and participation, organize the trips, and give people a chance to take their trips from the previous event. "SJ" is now considered the *crème de la crème* of fund-raisers, attracting New Orleanians as well as an international crowd.

THE LOOK

"Sentimental Journeys" has always been known for its stunning décor, so to create an ambiance fit for the occasion, "SJ" co-chair Henry Lambert contacted designer Jon Vaccari—whose sophisticated home interiors have been published in *Southern Accents*, *Martha Stewart Living* and other magazines—to design the party's look. Vaccari changed the original Art Deco theme, which "seemed a little cold," he says, to the Hollywood glamour of the 1940s, an era with which Vaccari admits he has a fascination.

Because the "SJ" dinner and auction is held under a large tent, one of the major problems is how to make a tent not look like a tent. Vaccari called Brian Worley of Angel City

The high point of any "Sentimental Journeys" party is the auction, which guests could read more about in the event's catalogue.



Designs in Los Angeles to come to New Orleans to drape the entire tent in silver-blue fabric. Artist Gretchen Howard painted the decorative panels that were placed around the perimeter of the tent and stenciled the floors. The tent poles were draped in silver-blue moiré fabric donated by Scalamandre and topped with fabricated palm tree fronds painted white. Also painted white were the coral-shaped chandeliers Vaccari had made just for the event. The tables' centerpieces were varied, but were mainly white flowers filled in with greenery, courtesy of Marcel Wolterinck, who flew in from Holland just for "SJ."



The prep work in the kitchen (hidden away in another part of the tent) took an immense amount of teamwork from the Ritz-Carlton New Orleans staff.

To set the tone when people entered the tent, Vaccari had Riverland Landscape and Design Services place lush greenery outside the entrance. Just inside, a glamorous mini-salon draped with the Scalamandre fabric was furnished with mid-century modern pieces from Vaccari's store, Jon Vaccari Design, creating an entryway to the rest of the tent.

"The tent was the most beautiful creation I have ever seen in New Orleans," says event co-chair Beth Trotter.

Ledbetter concurs, "The tent was spectacular. Jon Vaccari and crew were successful in transforming a simple tent into an MGM film set designed by art director Cedric Gibbons from

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With furniture from his store, designer Jon Vaccari set up a mini-salon at the tent's entrance.

the 'The Thin Man' era." Ledbetter, by the way, has the daunting task of creating the look for the October 2004 "SJ."

THE PARTY

The day of the party was mostly overcast, clouds heavy with

rain that fell only when the mood hit. Workmen worked throughout the day putting the final touches on the tent's décor and the exterior, while the catering staff from the Ritz-Carlton New Orleans, overseen by Ritz-Carlton chef Eric Branger and guest chef Ron Siegel from Masa's in San Francisco, went into high gear.

As the hour approached for the wine-tasting, which is held just before the main event, the rain started to get heavier. Despite the weather, the Spirit of Cambodia dancers performed as guests approached the Old Metairie home of Mr. and Mrs. C. Allen Favrot, where the wine-tasting occurred. And even though the grounds outside the Favrot house were hazardous to women's Manolo Blahnik stilettos, that didn't mean the stiletto-shod

didn't venture outside underneath the tent to sample wines from Cuvaision Winery, Ferrari-Carano Vineyards & Winery, Hanzell Vineyards, Merry Edwards Wines, Robert Craig Wine Cellars, Viador Vineyards and Quady Winery.

Soon it was time to pull out the umbrellas and go across the street to the main tent, firmly planted in the yard of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Moffett. The four-course meal was served paired with four wines, and Pink Martini, a band that combines Latin, classical and jazz elements, entertained partygoers.

But the highlight of "SJ" is the live auction of exotic trips—30 to be exact donated by many generous contributors. Some of the highlights include sojourns to Scotland, southeast Asia, a week in New York City for the spring 2004 fashion shows, and a stay at a Loire Valley château.

ANOTHER SUCCESS

While a final figure for how much was raised is unavailable, the event's co-chairs—Henry Lambert, Lynne Uhalt and Beth Trotter—were ecstatic about the committee's support. "We all



Before the gala, the Favrot home filled with Longue Vue House and Gardens supporters, who donned their best tuxedos and designer gowns.

shared the work load evenly, and the subcommittee chairmen were probably the most dedicated and talented people I have ever worked with," says Trotter.

And in the end, that's what fund-raising is all about: a community pulling together to create an event that can raise money to help support an organization or institution that's vital to the city. ★

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