


Southern Accents

BEAUTIFUL HOMES, GRACIOUS LIVING, A SENSE OF PLACE



Bright Ideas, Pretty Rooms

53 pages of stylish renovations

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19th-century cottages of the ravaged Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood of Holy Cross have gotten as much attention as Canal Street. France stepped in to adopt Treme, a very old neighborhood of Creoles of color and home to many jazz musicians, ensuring that this faubourg adjacent to the French Quarter won't crumble away without a thought.

If our eyes were not full enough of these wonders, we have art as never before. The New Orleans Museum of Art, isolated in a lake of floodwaters, was watched over by staff members too passionate to bail out. Led by charismatic director E. John Bullard, the museum opened a mere six months after the storm with only a skeleton crew. Last spring it mounted a blockbuster exhibition, "Femme, femme, femme," organized by the French government. Now, encouraged by a brilliant board and help from friends and strangers, the museum is planning an ambitious expansion. The internationally recognized National World War II Museum, undaunted by the hurricane, recommitted to a planned \$30 million expansion that will nearly quadruple the size of its facility. The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, relatively new to the turf, has come back with explosive energy. The opening of the adjacent Patrick F. Taylor library, an undisputed 19th-century architectural gem designed by Henry Hobson Richardson, is a dream come true. Things are set to rock and roll for the Ogden with the new chairperson of its board, Julia Reed, a writer, media commentator, and above all, connoisseur of all flavors Southern.

The Historic New Orleans Collection is preparing a monumental and groundbreaking book on the history of Louisiana furniture. If the storm shook out any complacency, it was about the fragility of our material culture.

Many jazz and blues musicians who lived in affected areas have moved away or stayed and struggled. Never before has the city been as aware of their names, grieved their losses, or treasured their presence as now. This is a city always musical. As great as its tradition of vernacular music is, its history of classical music is even more venerable. The first permanent opera house in North America was in New Orleans, and at one point in the 19th century, there were enough performances to fill every mild-weather week. Many American debuts occurred in the city, and the taste for classical music endures and prospers.

The New Orleans Opera, unable to perform in its regular location after the flood, had its comeback in 2006 in the New Orleans Arena, where, undaunted by stadium seats, people in black tie

wept and cheered as loud as sports fans when Placido Domingo waltzed across the stage with Frederica von Stade, singing from *The Merry Widow*. In November, still in borrowed quarters, the opera defiantly performed Puccini's *Il Trittico* using New Orleans settings for its staging.

If anything was more missed and more quickly fixed, it was our café culture. In the dark days right after the storm, chefs such as Scott Boswell, John Besh, and Horst Pfeifer scavenged to feed the troops and storm victims. Once the skilletts were fired up, we knew everything was somehow going to be all right. Forget the potholes and the politicians; if you pull up a chair for Ken Smith's Creole cooking at Upperline or Donald Link's home-based cuisine at Herbsaint, progress is palatable.

When big winds shake old roots, bare limbs can leave things looking shabby and

"Though there is every reason to feel drab, the façades of resurrected houses assert a palette that is luscious and playful."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The outrageous colors emerging in many old neighborhoods profess hope and good-humored style. Local entrepreneur Sidney Torres IV is getting accolades for his stylish and successful SDT sanitation trucks; the sweet-smelling streets mark a transformation in the city's curb appeal. Battered houses are being transformed on every street. Since the storm, Jessica Harris, authority on the African diaspora and its culinary history, divides her time between New York and New Orleans, where she is scholar-in-residence in the Ray Charles chair at Dillard University.

half-dead at first. Something in nature loves a challenge. Today, never have the gardens been so lush with blooms. We are overpowered by oleander and datura; the cassia has staged a riot. Peter Edwards, who has been watching over a huge pecan tree forever, gave up hope in 2006 when no fruit was produced. This fall, he had to call in grandchildren as reinforcements to harvest a bumper crop. Pecans will be roasted and salted and given as gifts, mixed with burnt sugar and made into candy or stirred into pies. The bits and pieces will be chopped and bagged for toppings on sweet potatoes. Pecan trees are finicky, and they don't lie, Edwards says. He predicts we're heading for some mighty good times. ♦

For details, see *Sourcebook*, page 178.

