

## RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS

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# Longue Vue House and Gardens

by Mary Yee

**W**ITH A GRAND Classical mansion on eight acres surrounded by live oaks, camellias, azaleas, and magnolias, Longue Vue House and Gardens appears to be a typical Southern estate in New Orleans. Dig a little deeper and it soon becomes clear that it's not just another tourist attraction. It's a cultural landmark connecting three remarkable women in the first half of the 20th century—women whose stories are still relevant today.

### A CONFLUENCE OF TRAILBLAZERS

Longue Vue was the home of businessman Edgar Stern and his wife, Edith, a plant enthusiast with family connections to the Sears, Roebuck Company. Both were philanthropists who made their home in New Orleans when they married in 1921. They hired renowned New England landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman to design their gardens and Louisiana naturalist and conservationist Caroline Dorman to provide expertise on a one-acre Wild Garden filled with plants native to the southeastern United States.

Shipman founded a women-staffed landscape architecture firm that included the Fords and Duponts among its clients. Dorman led the effort to create Louisiana's Kisatchie National Forest and was the first woman to be elected into the Society of American Foresters. The Sterns were active in many social causes, including furthering education for African Americans by helping establish Dillard University. Shipman, Dorman, and Edith Stern remained involved in the development of Longue Vue for the rest of their lives. Although Shipman did not design the mansion itself, the Sterns enlisted her services in its interior design.

Longue Vue opened to the public in 1968. Edith, who died in 1980, lived long enough to see her garden enjoyed



The Wild Garden is a showcase for plants native to the southeastern United States, such as late bonaset (*Eupatorium serotinum*), blooming along a path, above, and woodland pinkroot (*Spigelia marilandica*) near the pigeonnier, left.

by many in the community. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2005, Longue Vue is “the most intact example of the mature work of Ellen Biddle Shipman,” says Lenora Costa, Longue Vue’s curator and historian. “Of the over 600 projects she completed in her career, we are unique in that we have both exterior and interior spaces designed by her.”

### A PLACE FOR NATIVE PLANTS

Caroline Dorman’s influence can be felt in the Wild Garden, which dates to 1939 and has a relaxed, natural feel in keeping with its name. Dorman and Edith Stern kept an ongoing correspondence about what plants should be introduced and

how individual ones were faring. Dorman was adamant that invasive non-natives be removed in favor of native groundcovers, violets, and other species. In one letter, Stern wrote Dorman, “I promise you at long last, the bamboo will come out of the Wild Garden.”

“The garden still possesses the romantic character of Shipman’s design of winding paths, lush plantings, dappled shade through mid-story trees, with the pond and pigeonier as focal points,” says Director of Gardens Amy Graham. “In recent years, a slightly more diverse plant palette has been adopted to support pollinator health and indigenous plant education.” Here visitors will see natives such as *Rhododendron austrinum*, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, *Helianthus an-*



Open for guided tours, Longue Vue’s classically-inspired house, built between 1939 and 1942, features superior examples of interior spaces designed by Ellen Biddle Shipman.

*gustifolius*, woodland pinkroot (*Spigelia marilandica*), American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), and buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*).

The Iris Walk and Camellia Walk in the Wild Garden offer spectacular seasonal displays. According to Graham, the Louisiana irises—including some hybridized by Dorman—are the highlight of the garden in spring and walking the path “conjures the experience of viewing these plants in their native habi-

tat of a swamp from a canoe.” In winter, the Camellia Walk showcases over 100 blooming cultivars.

## GARDENS OF GRANDEUR AND PURPOSE

The gardens in the rest of the estate include the formal and the practical. A grand allee of southern live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) serves as Longue Vue’s entrance. The Goldfish Pond includes a sweeping view of the East Lawn. In spring, the Azalea Walk, which connects the north colonnade of the main house to the East Lawn is awash with colorful blooms. Boxwood parterres in the Portico Garden contrast with colorful plantings of airy perennials such as garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) and Diamond Frost® euphorbia (*E. hypericifolia*).

The Walled Garden, which served as the Sterns’ kitchen garden, is used today for Longue Vue’s Cultivating Communities program, which teaches local students gardening and business skills. Here, students learn to grow vegetables, herbs, and other edibles and later market and sell the produce.

One of the newer gardens, The Discovery Garden, installed in 1998, encourages children to interact with plants and gain appreciation for nature. Colorful signage helps kids learn how to read a sundial, find out how pitcher plants get their meals, and how worms are nature’s recyclers.

## PRESERVING THE LEGACY

In 2022, Longue Vue will continue to celebrate the garden’s centennial with several renewal initiatives. “We’re taking a probing look at the legacy of the Sterns and what it calls on us to do in the 21st century,” says Executive Director Baty Landis. “We’re assessing our core relationship to the land and water around us and adjusting our practices to become better partners with the land.” Landis adds, “We’re also seeking to make centennial investments in the conservation of Ellen Biddle Shipman’s original design of the entire Longue Vue property.” These efforts will ensure that the work of three extraordinary women will continue to be enjoyed for generations to come. ☞

Mary Yee is managing editor and art director of *The American Gardener*.

## Additional Information

### Longue Vue House and Gardens

7 Bamboo Road  
New Orleans, LA 70124  
(504) 488-5488  
<https://longuevue.com>

- Hours: Monday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.
- Admission: Self-guided garden tour only: \$10 per person. Admission and guided tour of house or garden: \$20. Admission and guided tour of garden and house: \$25.
- RAP benefits: Free admission.

## HOW THE RECIPROCAL ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (RAP) WORKS

This American Horticultural Society program is designed to encourage people to visit gardens, arboreta, and conservatories while traveling. As a current member, you receive free admission and/or other special discounts at more than 330 sites throughout North America! Here’s how to make the most of this member benefit:

- View the current list of participating locations and the RAP benefits they offer at [www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens](http://www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens).
- Contact the garden to confirm the RAP benefits it offers. (Some sites may choose to enforce a 90-mile exclusion policy; if your zip code falls within that distance from the location, you would not receive the offered RAP benefits there.) Admission to special events may also be excluded.
- Present your current membership card at the admissions counter or gift shop to receive the RAP benefit(s) offered by that garden. Each card will only admit the individual(s) listed on the card. In the case of a family, couple, or household membership card that does not list individual names, the garden must extend the benefit(s) to at least two members; it is at the garden’s discretion to extend benefits to more than two individuals. Some gardens may require a photo ID.