



Travel



Photo by Catherine Ann Capo



Photo by Catherine Ann Capo

TOWN & COUNTRY



Photo by Michael Parks



Photo by Catherine Ann Capo

ELEGANCE



Photo by Catherine Ann Capo



Photo by Kathleen Heavers

Beautiful wrought-iron gates, fences and balconies are some of the architectural gems featured on the historic homes tour.

If you love all things domestic, put Charleston's home tours on your bucket list



BY JAMES E. BRENNAN

The gracious ladies standing watch on The Battery of Charleston harbor are a tough breed.

For more than 300 hundred years, many of these stately mansions have withstood hurricanes, torrential rains, earthquakes, tidal flooding, fires and wars.

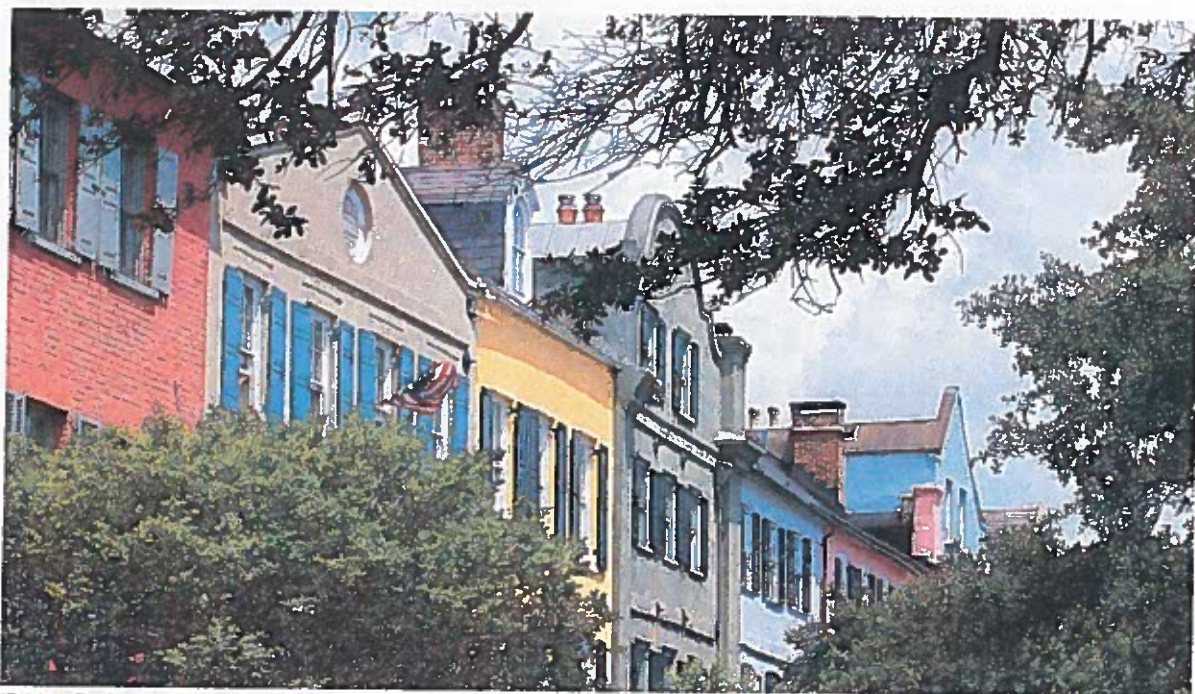
From White Point Gardens on East Battery Street, townsfolk watched the first Confederate shots of the Civil War fired on nearby Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861.

Four years later in April 1865, The Battery was in ruins from Union shellfire. A 7.3 Richter Scale earthquake nearly leveled the city in 1886.

The Sea Island Hurricane, the fourth deadliest in U.S. history, ravaged the city in 1893. Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, said, "Passing from The Battery northward, the scene of wreckage which meets the eye is desolate in the extreme."

And when I visited, Hurricane Joaquin flooded streets, bridges and parks. But even in the midst of the storm, the Charleston 39th Fall Tour of Homes and Gardens soldiered on with umbrellas and smiles.

The resilient spirit of these magnificent homes and their owners is spotlighted three



"Rainbow Row" is the nickname for a cluster of 13 pastel-painted Georgian row houses in Charleston, S.C.

Photo courtesy of Explore Charleston

times a year, as gates and gardens are opened for private tours.

With the help of 700 proud volunteers, visitors are offered intimate views of interior furnishings, fine silverware, works of art and walled pocket gardens.

The Preservation Society of Charleston presents the 40th Fall Tour of Homes and Gardens Oct. 6-30. For ticket details and dates of walking tours, architectural gems talks and luncheon lectures, check Thefalltours.org.

The Historic Charleston Foundation's 70th Festival of Houses and Gardens takes place next March during peak bloom time. History walks, lunch talks, garden concerts, boat cruises and wine tastings are listed at Historiccharleston.org.

The Garden Club of Charleston offers its 82nd House and Garden Tour for two days in April next year. Dates and ticket prices are available at Thegardclubofcharleston.org.

Charleston is approximately 870 miles from Buffalo - around 12 to 13 hours by car.

A little history

Founded in 1670 in honor of King Charles II of England, Charleston sits on a peninsula surrounded by barrier islands. The location "is where the Cooper and Ashley Rivers come

together to form the Atlantic Ocean."

In the late 1700s, the port city prospered as rice, cotton and indigo barons reaped wealth from their plantations. They built stately houses in the town.

George Washington came to visit in May 1791 and stayed in the home of Thomas Heyward Jr., a signer of the Declaration of Independence. After the president's visit, it became known as the Heyward-Washington House and is now a beautifully furnished National Landmark operated by the Charleston Museum.

The city was spared the wrath of Union General William Tecumseh Sherman in 1865. Following the Civil War, the citizens were too poor to remodel so they preserved and adapted their older neo-Gothic buildings.

Earthquake bolts

The 1886 earthquake caused the demolition of 100 buildings and prompted owners to install supportive iron rods that ran through the interiors and were attached to the exteriors. The decorative end-cap plates of these "earthquake bolts" are still visible on many older structures.

The flower or star-shaped bolt covers are just one of many ornamental elements highlighted on city tours. Others include half-moon-shaped lunettes or fanlights over carved wood-

en doorways, beveled and stained-glass windows, gilt-painted cornice moldings and finely turned balusters.

There are also "piazzas" or side porches that provide shade and catch sea breezes, ornate gas-lit lanterns and beautiful wrought-iron gates, fences and balconies.

Where to start

Visitors can purchase maps, guidebooks and wristbands for self-guided tours at the Preservation Society office at 147 King St. Dated passes cover about seven properties each day in one of a dozen themed walks around streets named after the city's founders.

Tours led by city-licensed guides also depart from that office. The 2½-hour strolls over cobblestone streets cover such topics as architectural styles, Revolutionary and Civil War history, the lives of slaves and the privileged elite and artistic iron works of the "Holy City."

Charleston is nicknamed that because of the preponderance of church spires, more than 400 places of worship and its long history of religious tolerance.

If you don't like walking, there are more than 40 historical and heritage tours via horse-drawn carriages, pedicabs and bicycles. Boats also cruise

Continued on next page



the harbor and sail out to Fort Sumter National Monument.

Historic homes

In a city with one of the best-preserved historic districts in America, there are also a number of homes worth exploring that aren't included in the seasonal tours.

Five houses, two plantations and "America's First Museum" (Charleston Museum, founded in 1773) are covered by the Charleston Heritage Passport.

The 2, 3 or 7-day passport can be purchased at the Charleston Visitors Center, 375 Meeting St. Links to all the sites are found on HeritageFederation.org.

Here are Heritage Passport homes:

Drayton Hall (circa 1747) is the nation's oldest unrepaired plantation house. Set on 350 acres, the Palladian-style mansion is unfurnished with creaky floorboards and a two-story front porch. An earthquake destroyed a laundry house in 1886 and the kitchen was leveled by a hurricane in 1893.

Heyward-Washington House (mentioned on page 97, circa 1772) is a Georgian-style house with an original 1740s kitchen building, Charleston-made furniture and formal gardens.

Joseph Manigault House (circa 1803) is a three-story Adam-style brick manse with a two-story porch on a raised brick foundation. The interior boasts lots of woodwork, carved fireplaces, fine paintings and a crystal chandelier.

Nathaniel Russell House (circa 1808) is a beautifully restored neoclassical brick dwelling surrounded by formal gardens. The showstopper is a free-flowing, cantilevered, three-story spiral staircase.

Aiken-Rhett House (circa 1820) is the city's most-intact antebellum mansion. The house is

preserved, but not updated from when it was last used. Note the original wallpaper, bronze chandelier, antique furnishings, detached kitchen and slave quarters.

Edmondston-Alston House (circa 1825) is a three-story Federal/Greek Revival-style mansion with three piazzas overlooking the "High Battery" promenade. After giving the order to fire on Fort Sumter, Confederate commander P.T. Beauregard watched the bombardment from the porch. Robert E. Lee also stayed there in 1861.

The house is now a museum administered by the Middleton Place Foundation, which also operates Middleton Place Plantation about 15 miles northwest of the city.

Middleton Place is a 6,000-acre rice plantation, home to the oldest landscaped gardens in America and named after Henry Middleton, second president of the First Continental Congress.

Henry began work on the gardens in 1741 and gave the property to his son, Arthur, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, in 1763.

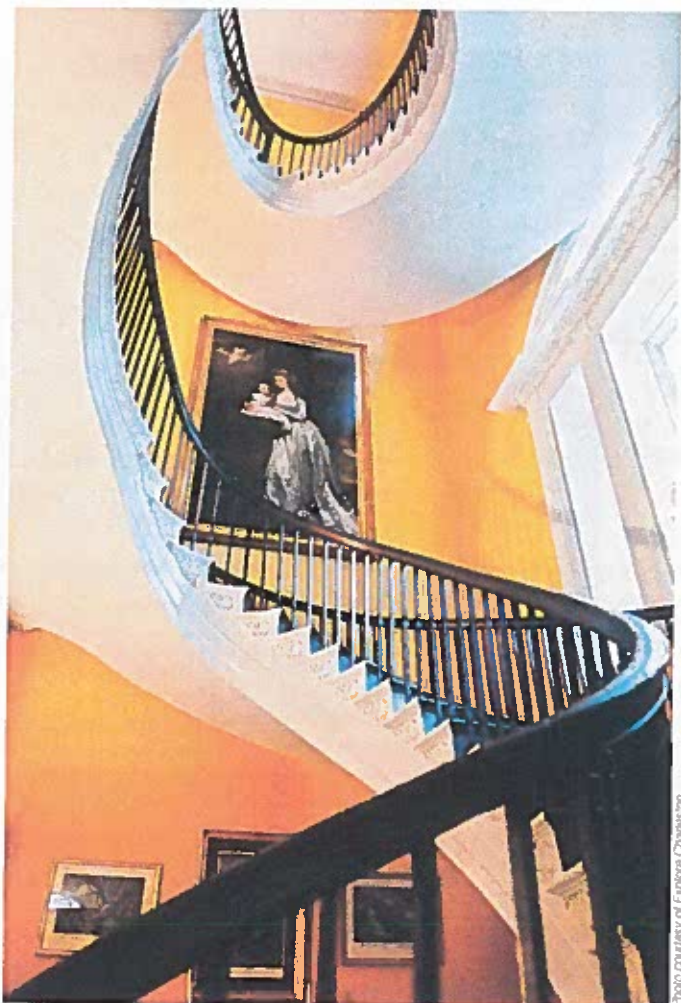
Today there are 65 acres of boxwoods, camellias, azaleas, crepe myrtle and roses spread over terraces around a butterfly-shaped lake.

Adjacent to the gorgeous gardens is the Inn at Middleton Place, a 55-room low-profile hotel nestled among tall pines and moss-laden oaks. Inn guests have free access to the house museum, stables and rice mill. TheInnatmiddletonplace.com

Stay the night

Visitors can buy a town-and-country combination ticket to tour the plantation and Edmondston-Alston House. For details, see Middletonplace.org.

"And if folks want to stay at the best address in Charleston,



A spectacular free-flowing, cantilevered, spiral staircase ascends all three floors of the Nathaniel Russell House

Photo courtesy of Europe Channel

we have a luxury bed and breakfast at the same address as the Edmondston-Alston House," said Abigail (Tuberdyke) Martin, a Buffalo native who manages both the inn and the waterfront B&B, which is called 21 East Battery.

"The rooms are located down a brick path through a private garden in the two-story Quarters and a renovated Carriage House," Martin explained. "Guests are provided tickets to the museum." 21eastbattery.com

Another grand estate that welcomes overnight guests is the Wentworth Mansion. Built in 1886 for a cotton merchant with 13 children, the restored 21-room inn has 12-foot ceilings, crystal chandeliers, whirlpool tubs and marble fireplaces.

There's a spa in the stables and cocktails in the rooftop cupola. Reese Witherspoon

spent her honeymoon here. Wentworthmansion.com

One of the city's newest renovated lodgings is the Spectator Hotel, located in the French Quarter one block from the Charleston City Market. The 41-room Art Deco hotel opened in the spring of 2015 and has been rated No. 4 by TripAdvisor. One upscale feature is a gourmet breakfast delivered by a butler assigned to your room. TheSpectatorhotel.com

Magnolia Plantation

Magnolia Plantation and Gardens has been the ancestral home of the Drayton family since 1676. The 500-acre plantation has remained under the control of the Drayton-Hastie family for 15 generations.

The estate, which features America's oldest public gardens,



Above. A butterfly-shaped lake and curved terraces highlight America's oldest landscaped gardens at Middleton Place Plantation. **Below left.** Buffalo native Abigail (Tuberdyke) Martin manages both the Inn at Middleton Place and 21 East Battery—a carriage house B&B behind the Edmondston-Alston House. **Below right.** The Edmondston-Alston House has three piazzas overlooking the "High Battery" promenade.

was established by Thomas Drayton along the Ashley River. His youngest son, John, built Drayton Hall, which is just down the road.

The Romantic-style grounds include alligator-filled swamp gardens, which are thought to be the last of their kind in the U.S. There also are restored slave cabins, Sunday bird walks and a petting zoo.

Magnoliaplantation.com

This plantation also has a city lodging connection at Battery Carriage House Inn (circa 1843), which is owned by Drayton Hastie. The boutique hotel at 20 South Battery has four-poster beds in 10 rooms and one suite. *Batterycarriagehouse.com*

Other plantations

Boone Hall (circa 1681) has a grand ¾-mile entry road lined with 88 arched oak trees. The 738-acre spread is one of America's oldest working plantations and still produces strawberries, tomatoes and pumpkins.

Along with mansion visits, tours cover slave cabins, a butterfly pavilion, 100-year-old rose gardens and the "Gullah Culture" of enslaved Africans.

Boonehallplantation.com

Charleston Tea Plantation (circa 1888) is located on 10-mile-long Wadmalaw



Island, where 320 varieties of black and green tea are grown on 127 acres. A trolley travels through tea fields of "America's Only Tea Garden." A factory tour explains how tea leaves are turned into Bigelow Tea, which bought the property in 2003. *Charlestonteaplantation.com*

Free guide and info

To get a free visitor's guide, check out *Charlestoncub.com*. The site provides places to stay and eat, things to see and do, special offers and coupons, a calendar of events and the locations of four visitor centers. ■

James E. Brennan, a freelance writer from East Aurora, frequently writes about travel for Buffalo Magazine.

