

# Degas House Historic Home, Courtyard & Inn



Degas House on Esplanade Avenue, New Orleans

For four-and-a-half months in 1872-73, a young Edgar Degas, not yet the world-famous French Impressionist, lived at his maternal uncle's house at 2306 Esplanade Avenue, just outside of New Orleans' French Quarter. While there, Degas thrived in the local culture and painted 18 paintings. He also wrote several letters home to his family in France, detailing life in this exotic American city. Today, visitors have the opportunity to experience New Orleans through Degas' eyes, when they visit the **Degas House Historic Home, Courtyard & Inn**. The beautifully-restored home is the **ONLY** home or studio of Degas anywhere in the world that is open to the public. The home is a museum, and hosts guided tours, bed and breakfast guests, and special events, including wedding ceremonies and receptions. It is also the home of the Edgar Degas Foundation "whose educational mission includes preserving the legacy of Degas for New Orleans and the World."

The Degas House is located in

Esplanade Ridge, the largest Historic District in the U.S. Built in 1854, the home was inhabited by the Musson family, Degas' maternal American cousins, who lived there from 1869-79. During his stay, Degas wrote descriptive letters to his family in France, and offered intimate details of the city and its inhabitants. He also produced 18 paintings during his visit, including: "**Portraits in an Office, The New Orleans Cotton Exchange**", "**Woman Seated on a Balcony**", "**Portrait of Madame Rene DeGas**", and "**The Rehearsal of a Song**." The paintings provide a glimpse of life along the Creole corridor of Esplanade Avenue.

Since Degas departed the city 135 years ago, the home has had its share of drama. Degas' younger brother, Rene, abandoned his wife-cousin and their children in 1878, and eloped with their neighbor. Also, the original Mansion was divided in two during the 1920s, and one wing was moved twenty feet to the side. Thus, the structure was re-formed

into two residences. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an award-winning restoration by owner David Villarrubia was completed on the main Degas House. The second portion of the original Mansion, also purchased by Villarrubia, is currently being restored. This portion contains Degas' bedroom and studio.

Under Villarrubia's ownership, the home has been restored to its former glory, and now serves as a Historic Museum House, and includes a bed-and-breakfast, reception setting and museum open for tours.

"New Orleans was a turning point in Degas' life," remarks Villarrubia. "It is no coincidence that one year after leaving New Orleans, Degas, among his contemporaries, opens the First Impressionist Exhibition in Paris." Villarrubia's passion to preserve the home and its history caught the attention of the French government. In March, Pierre Vimont, French Ambassador to the U.S., visited the Degas House, where he presented Villarrubia with the designation of

*Chevalier* or Knight in the **French National Order of Arts and Letters**. The honor is bestowed upon individuals who make significant contributions to the arts, literature, or to the propagation of these fields.

As a bed-and-breakfast, rooms and suites located on the 2nd and 3rd floors are named for the Musson-Degas Family. With names like the "Estelle Suite" and the "Josephine Room," these rooms are the same rooms where the family actually resided. Features include hardwood floors, 13-foot ceilings, period furnishings, Degas reproductions, wireless internet, continental breakfast on weekdays, and Creole breakfast on weekends. A guided tour of the house is included and is conducted by Degas' great grand niece, Joan Prados. The tour includes the viewing of the award-winning documentary, *Degas in New Orleans, A Creole Sojourn*.

For special events, including weddings and large parties, the Degas House offers two spacious parlors, a dining room, intimate courtyard, and gallery. The house comfortably accommodates meetings, weddings, seminars, luncheons, receptions, and

every type of special event.

The house is open daily to the public for guided tours, which are conducted by appointment only and last for about one hour. Visitors can also take a self-guided tour of the neighborhood, with the "**The Creole Neighborhood of Edgar Degas**" walking tour. Developed by Villarrubia and his staff, the self-guided tour is based on Degas' observations during his walks to the newly-opened Fairgrounds race course, the French Quarter, the Central Business District, and throughout the neighborhood.

Proceeds from all tours go to the **Edgar Degas Foundation**. The foundation was created to preserve Degas' legacy and serves as a cultural resource center for the public. The Foundation provides books, videos, and research material to the public, and produced the award-winning documentary.

For more information on the **Degas House Historic Home, Courtyard & Inn**, call **504.821.5009** or visit **www.degashouse.com** or **www.degas.org**.



David Villarrubia, restorer of the historic home, was awarded the designation of *Chevalier* by the French Ambassador to the United States.