

ROOMS WITH A VIEW



THE YELLOW HOUSE ON PLOTT CREEK ROAD



THOMAS WALTON MANOR



CAMELLIA COTTAGE BED AND BREAKFAST

BED & BREAKFASTS

Take some time to smell the roses at one of three bed-and-breakfast inns that offer the serenity of beautiful gardens.

By Kathy Grant Westbrook

Charming guest rooms, gracious innkeepers, and breakfasts worth writing home about — what more could you ask of a bed and breakfast? How about access to fabulous landscapes and gardens? When visiting any one of these establishments, you'll definitely want to take time to smell the roses, and the gardenias, and, well, you get the picture.

The Yellow House on Plott Creek Road

Guests' initial view of this bed and breakfast does indeed reveal a yellow house — a stately, neo-Classical, yellow house, to be exact — standing tall on a hill, its lower half hidden behind a thick, lush wall of greenery punctuated by brilliant bursts of color. It's an unforgettable first impression.

The 1885 house, originally built as a summer home for the Lykes family of Tampa, Florida, is located in western North Carolina, just outside Waynesville. When it was converted into a bed and breakfast in 1995, several gardens were developed on the five-acre property, and two ponds located behind it were stocked with koi. The outdoor ambience

became one of The Yellow House's major selling points. Unfortunately, though, by the time siblings Susan Cerise and Don Cerise purchased the inn in October 2006, it had been through a second set of owners, and somewhere along the way, the grounds had given way to neglect. The Cerises made restoration of the gardens and grounds their top priority.

"Within our first two months of ownership, we started the 'waterfall project,'" Susan recalls. "It's a natural flow from the mountaintop into the upper pond and now falling into the lower pond and emptying into Plott Creek." On the adjacent hillside, they added a stone terrace where guests can sit and enjoy the sound of water tumbling over rock, while basking in the afternoon sunlight that filters through the trees.

"Our plan [this year] is to add an additional seating area near the lower pond and re-work the existing grounds and gardens to include native plants — flame azaleas, native ferns, [and] deer tongue laurels," Susan says.

Numerous seating areas are scattered throughout the property, providing guests with ample opportunities to enjoy their surroundings. In front of the inn, for example, two white Adirondack



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTINE McCLIMANS

Nature can be found both indoors and out at the Thomas Walton Manor, which boasts a large sunroom.



Featuring a private balcony, the English-inspired Carriage House Suite (left) at The Yellow House on Plott Creek Road (above) provides an impressive view of the grounds.



chairs are nestled amid a cornucopia of hydrangea, burning bush, rose of Sharon, azalea, lamb's ear, Eastern snowball, and barberry. Beside the inn, a suite of white wicker furniture invites guests to enjoy a view of the small pond and waterfall below. And on the veranda, with its brick flooring and white columns, there are several tables and chairs, along with a number of rockers — a perfect spot to enjoy the hors d'oeuvres and wine (or soft drinks, if you prefer) that are served at the inn early each evening.

At the end of the day, rest assured your indoor accommodations will be equally appealing. The main inn has three comfortable, tastefully decorated guest rooms and four suites, while three additional suites are located in the Upper Pond House (named for its location overlooking one of the ponds). Most of the suites have whirlpool tubs, king-sized beds, and fireplaces; all seven have private balconies or decks.

Breakfast at The Yellow House often starts with fresh fruit and then progresses to quiche, vegetable frittata, or some similarly tasty dish. If you're a people person, you may want to eat in the dining room, where you can mingle with fellow guests; if, however, you prefer a quieter start to the day, there's

the option of having breakfast served in your private quarters. When weather permits, guests also dine on the veranda, which affords an early morning view of The Yellow House's impressive grounds.

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Thomas Walton Manor

Growing up in Laurinburg in the south-central part of our state, Larry Horne always admired the 1939 Georgian Colonial home that stood in prominence on Church Street. He found himself drawn to its elegantly restrained architecture, characterized by features like the understated entrance, with its wrought-iron-and-bronze curved handrails leading to a recessed entryway that's topped with a pineapple finial. What Horne never saw from his sidewalk view was the meticulously landscaped backyard with its gardens and brick walkways. He discovered the hidden treasure when he and friend Ron Phillips decided to purchase the home in 1999 and convert it into a bed and breakfast. They dubbed it the Thomas

Walton Manor, borrowing "Thomas" from Horne's mother's name and "Walton" from Phillips's mother's name.

The home's original owners, the Hervey Evans family, had hired renowned landscape architect Charles Gillette of Richmond, Virginia, to design a landscape befitting the dignified style of the home, and Gillette did just that. By the time Horne and Phillips bought the property, the grounds had become overgrown, but fortunately the "bones" of Gillette's design remained. Horne and Phillips began restoring the gardens to their previous splendor, with the help of local landscaper Gus Purcell. Their efforts paid off in 2005 when they received the Minnette C. Duffy Landscape Preservation Award, the state's highest award for the restoration of landscapes related to historic structures.

The original brick walls and pathways that help define the gardens are still intact, as are the original fishpond and herb garden — although Horne did "re-accessorize" these areas. For example, he added interest to the herb garden by placing in its center an astrolabe (an ancient astronomy tool), and he livened up a nearby brick wall with a tile mosaic from Lebanon. Along an ivy-covered fence that lines one side of the property,



The landscape isn't the only beautiful element of the Thomas Walton Manor, as evidenced by a stained glass window in the foyer.

Horne placed several concrete sculptures, which he aged by “painting” them with buttermilk and moss.

The biggest change Horne and Phillips made to the landscape was to add a reflecting pool and gazebo to an area previously designated as a vegetable and cutting garden. Still, they remained faithful to Gillette’s style, patterning the gazebo after a garden structure Gillette had designed for another property.

During the summer, the gardens take on an almost tropical look, with plants like banana trees and Mexican heather. “But,” Horne says, “there are enough evergreens that it doesn’t look completely

barren in winter.” Depending on the season, you will also find crape myrtles, camellias, azaleas, and roses in bloom.

To invite the outdoor beauty in, Horne and Phillips added a sunroom to the back of the home, where most guests choose to enjoy the gourmet breakfasts prepared by Chef Anne Moberg. Moberg’s morning specialties include blueberry waffles and baked French toast; for afternoon tea, she often treats guests to her delightful Swedish pastries. Moberg clearly enjoys cooking for guests, positively beaming when she sees someone enjoying a dish she has prepared. “She adds a lot of personality to the place,” Horne says.

The Thomas Walton Manor has six charming guest rooms, two of which are part of the Anne McBride Suite, perfect for couples traveling with an in-law or teenager. A one-bedroom garden apartment is rented out for extended stays. Of the guest rooms, the most popular is the T.E. Lawrence Room. One reason for its popularity, says Horne, is its unique decor — an unexpected mix of antique American furniture and Arabian artifacts. Another reason: It boasts a view of the beautiful gardens that make the inn so special.

Thomas Walton Manor
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Camellia Cottage Bed and Breakfast

Seven years ago, Steven Skavroneck and his wife, Paula Tirrito, left their home in Wisconsin to vacation in North Carolina. Visiting the eastern part of our state, they were instantly smitten with Wilmington. “By the end of the third day, we were talking to a realtor,” recalls Tirrito. The couple eventually purchased a Queen Anne-style home on Fourth Street in Wilmington’s vibrant historic district. Built in 1889, the home once belonged to local artist Henry J. MacMillan and was already converted into Camellia Cottage Bed and Breakfast by the previous owners.

The quarter-acre lot on which the bed and breakfast is located showed great promise — brimming with decades-old camellia and azalea bushes — yet it was in definite need of some TLC. “When we moved in, we had to take a machete to it to get from the front to the back,” says Skavroneck. Fortunately, he and his wife, both avid gardeners, were up to the task.

They tidied up the cozy backyard, which has a nice secluded feel, thanks to the large Presbyterian church next door blocking out the sights and sounds of busy Third Street. They also spruced up a small brick-and-stone courtyard, which now serves as a popular spot for small weddings.

Turning their attention to the front yard, the couple created two plant beds and filled them with blueberry bushes, blackberry bushes, and lantana. Nearby,




As the folks at Camellia Cottage know, a glass of iced tea always tastes better on a spacious porch, with gorgeous plants serving as the backdrop.

they planted something they refer to as “the purple bush,” which Tirrito believes to be a species of baptisia. It got its start from a plant that grows by her mother’s home in Chicago, Illinois, and, says Tirrito, “We always dig up a piece and take it wherever we move.”

In addition to outdoor gardening, Skavroneck also has a passion for growing plants inside. As a matter of fact, when he and Tirrito made the move from Wisconsin, they rented a heated panel truck to transport the many plants he’d started from cuttings and seeds that today stand several feet tall. They include bird-of-paradise, pencil plant, ponytail palm, and barrel cactus. To accommodate Skavroneck’s hobby, the large bathroom in the inn’s sole downstairs guest room doubles as a greenhouse. During the winter, one entire wall is lined with greenery; when summer comes, about half of the plants are moved outdoors to help fill in the gardens.

In addition to the downstairs guest room, there are three guest rooms upstairs, as well as an apartment that’s rented out by the month. As Wilmington’s popularity continues to grow, Tirrito says she encounters more and more visitors who want

to spend some extended time in the city, as they contemplate making coastal North Carolina their home. Folks who travel with their canine companions will be happy to know that Camellia Cottage allows dogs — in fact, guests can expect to be greeted by resident dog Sparky, a neighborhood stray who claimed the inn as his permanent home and relishes his job as head of the welcoming committee.

Guests at Camellia Cottage start each day with a three-course breakfast. The first course often consists of bacon buns or sweet rolls and is followed by an entree like orange French toast with sausage. For dessert (yes, dessert!), expect something along the lines of chocolate custard or homemade ice cream. And, with appetites satisfied, guests can adjourn to the wide veranda that spans the front of the house, sink into a white wicker chair, and admire the results of Skavroneck and Tirrito’s love of gardening. 

to know more

For links to the inns’ websites, go to www.ourstate.com, and click on “This Month’s Issue.”

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