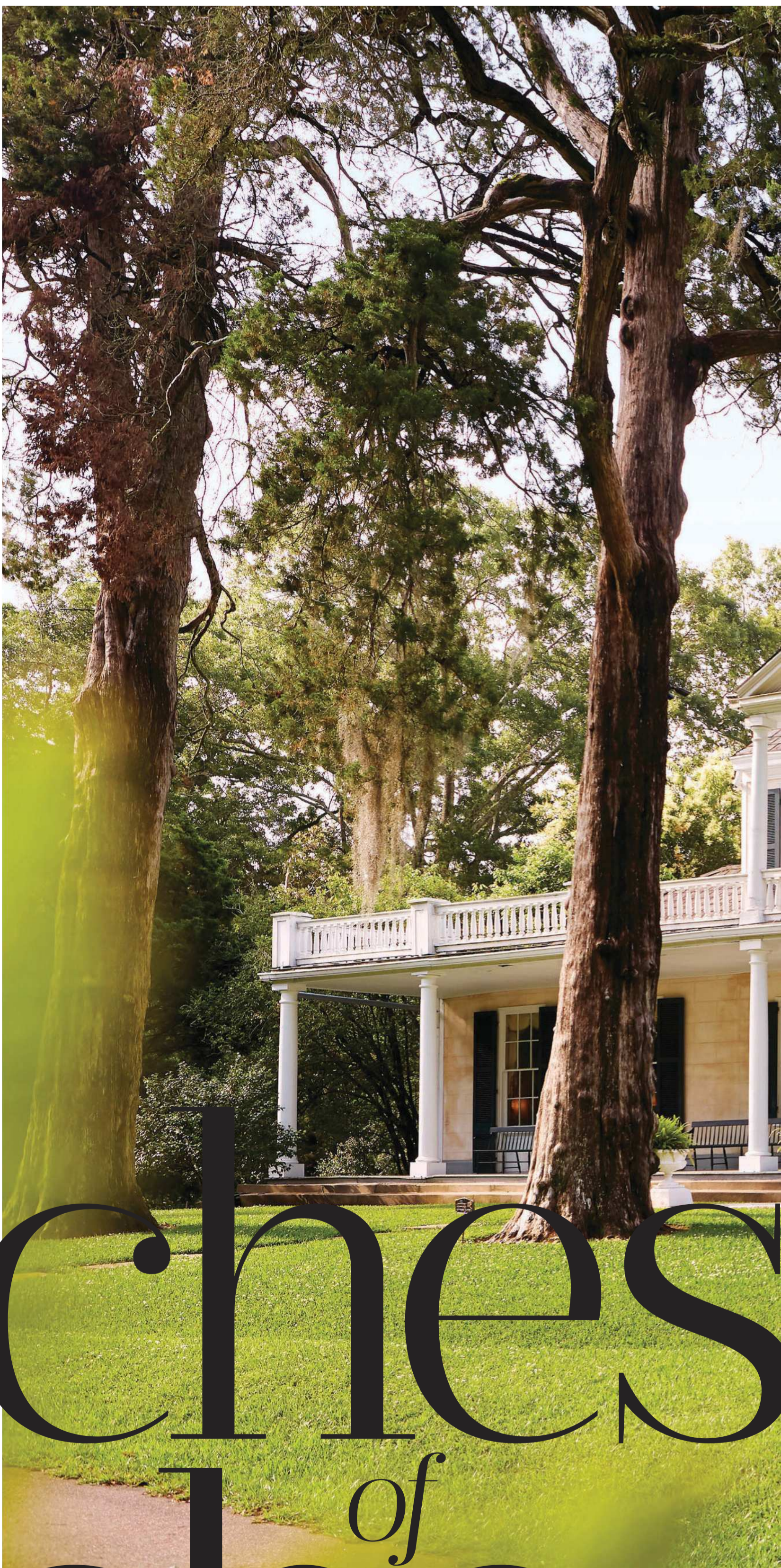


FIVE
HISTORIC
HOMES
WITH SOME
OF THE
PRETTIEST
VIEWS IN
MISSISSIPPI—
AND YOU
CAN STAY IN
ALL OF
THEM



The
Porch
of
Natchez





Family Home
Marjorie Feltus Hawkins with her late mother, Jeanette Feltus, at Linden

L GREW UP IN the storied city of Natchez, Mississippi. The oldest town on the Mississippi River, Natchez may not be as rowdy as

New Orleans or as famed for historic architecture as Charleston, South Carolina, but when it comes to good times in grand houses, this place can hold its own. Around here, many of us could mix perfectly proportioned sweet tea and differentiate between Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns by middle school. The best examples of both hospitality and history can be found on the spacious porches throughout town.

My childhood home, an 1837 Federal town house facing Main Street, boasted one so wide that I learned to skate on it. Downtown Natchez is composed of block after block of well-preserved 19th-century buildings—Federal, Greek Revival, Victorian—most with large porches (or “galleries” in the local parlance), which were originally built to escape the heat. It wasn’t until I became an adult and was looking to buy my own home in the Northeast that I realized that a good porch—as standard-issue to me as a kitchen—wasn’t a given everywhere.

Thankfully, my parents still live in Natchez, now a few blocks closer to the river in a French Second Empire home with a mansard roof, decorative ironwork, and a deep gallery that’s filled with wicker furniture. My siblings and I gravitate to that spot when we’re all in town, sometimes with coffee but more often with cocktails. It’s not unusual for friends to walk by, and then as easily as you can say, “Come have a glass of wine with us,” an impromptu happy hour stretches past midnight. This extra room, not inside but not outdoors either, gets more than a little credit for the laid-back, welcoming nature shared by the people of this city.

Linden Historic Bed and Breakfast

“**A**sk my husband, David, how many U-Haul trailers he’s had to drive from Nashville to Natchez,” says Marjorie

Feltus Hawkins, an interior designer who grew up in this Mississippi town but moved to the Music City after college. Two years ago, they began making the trip regularly, with everything from furniture to fabrics in tow, to revitalize Hawkins’ family home, Linden.

The original section of this mansion dates back to 1780; Hawkins’ ancestors have owned it since 1849. Probably best known for the stunning, almost 100-foot-long front gallery that runs the entire width of the house, Linden has always had a busy schedule of tours and guests.

Hawkins’ mother, Jeanette Feltus, had been directing operations here for four decades when COVID-19 hit. (Feltus passed away on October 1, 2021, a few months after our interview and photo

shoot.) It was a longer visit during lockdown that prompted Hawkins to start revamping the property. “Our wonderful general manager, Christy Williams, felt that Linden could become a spot for destination weddings,” Hawkins notes. “But if we were going to expand, we knew we’d have to do some updating. Closing when the pandemic hit gave us the time.”

Turning her decorator’s eye to the six guest rooms, she worked to bring a boutique feel to the place, with high-end linens and spalike baths. And though the grand gallery out front will probably always be Linden’s claim to fame, it was

**MARJORIE
FELTUS
HAWKINS &
JEANETTE
FELTUS**

the two-tiered back gallery—surrounding a courtyard and partially enclosed with the large louvered blinds called jalousies—that became the family’s go-to spot during their

extended stay. More a living room than a porch, with ceiling fans and cushioned couches and rockers, the space was an ideal retreat. Hawkins recalls that when close friends from Nashville dropped in for a visit, “We spent every night out there.”

Now that Linden is accepting bookings again, the wedding calendar is filling up fast and people have returned to the B&B from all over the country. Meeting on the back gallery nightly, guests often hang around long past sunset. Hawkins admits, “Sometimes, even when they have dinner reservations, no one wants to leave.” lindenbandb.com



Linden’s porch dates back to the 1800s.

Reclaiming the Past

This bed-and-breakfast honors the enslaved people who once lived here.



Concord Quarters

In some sense, Debbie Cosey (shown at right with her husband, Greg) has been in the hospitality business in Natchez since she was a kid. Her dad was the porter at the local Holiday Inn, and she and her three older brothers were often put to work there, folding towels after school. As an adult, Debbie managed some of the busiest bed-and-breakfast establishments in town. So it made sense that this hostess and businesswoman would eventually open one of her own.

A little less clear—to Greg at least—was her choice of a dilapidated, vine-covered brick structure. This two-story building with massive columns and a wide gallery was built in the 1820s. It was originally part of Concord, a 1,000-acre plantation with a mansion that was constructed in 1789 for the territory's Spanish governor. The building that houses the B&B was spared in the 1901 fire that took the main house.

DEBBIE & GREG COSEY

Only later did she discover that it had been half of the estate's slave quarters, built as a dairy and a pantry, with living space for at least 20 enslaved people on the top floor. The revelation made her all the more determined. Debbie and Greg have since renovated Concord Quarters, creating three spacious bedrooms upstairs and turning the two-level back gallery into a serene perch from which to view the gardens and centuries-old live oak trees.

Debbie continues to honor the building's original inhabitants at every opportunity. An 1844 inventory from the estate, on display on the main floor, lists the 124 men, women, and children who were enslaved here at the time with an accompanying column denoting the monetary value assigned to each. It is a sobering detail amid the beauty. But as Debbie points out, this is a crucial part of the story that must be told. "If we are talking about it, then we are healing," she says. concordquarters.com



Heavy With History

Natchez was the location of one of the largest slave markets in the country, known as Forks of the Road. Today, a memorial marks this somber site that's about a mile east of downtown. For more information, go to visitnatchez.org.



Edelweiss

“Had I known what the renovation would ultimately take, I’m not sure I would have gone through with it,” admits Greg Iles (shown below with his wife, Caroline). Edelweiss, an 1883 property with a fairy tale facade, had been a favorite of the *New York Times* best-selling author and Natchez native since childhood. “The house seemed to float above the ground in a way,” recalls Greg. “The place gave off a magical feeling.”

CAROLINE & GREG ILES

It stands on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River and is recognized as the finest example of Swiss chalet architecture in the state. When Edelweiss became available in 2008, Greg jumped at the chance to own it. However, after three-and-a-half years of renovations, Caroline says, “It would’ve been cheaper to bulldoze it and build the same house over again.”

In the end, the long effort was worth it. The second-floor wrap-around gallery is arguably the best place in town to watch the sun go down over the river. Though Greg bought Edelweiss with the idea that he would use the space as his office, an injury from a 2011 car accident makes the three floors with many stairs too cumbersome for him to be there every day. Instead, he and his wife now host the occasional party or book signing there and rent it out to visitors via Airbnb. “Caroline and I have done our part to show Edelweiss in its best light,” says Greg. “We’re proud of Natchez and want people to feel proud of the house.” edelweissnatchez.com



Old Flames
The sconces on either side of GardenSong’s front entryway are antique carriage lights salvaged from an 1800s coach.



Garden-Song Guest House

Not many cities offer visitors' accommodations at the mayor's house, but Dan M. Gibson (shown below left with his dog, Belle) is not the average mayor. Along with a passion for restoring historic properties and woodworking, Gibson has a résumé that includes titles like pianist, lobbyist, local-outreach minister, and published author. Elected in 2020, he is best known these days for wooing new businesses to town.

This approach may explain his thinking when he moved to Natchez in 2016 and jumped right into creating his B&B. Two months after his arrival, he opened guest rooms in his 1836 home, GardenSong. The property was built from components that were handcrafted in Cincinnati, traveled along the Mississippi River, and were then assembled in Natchez. A parterre garden and a gallery overlooking crepe myrtle-lined Washington Street create a tranquil haven on this downtown corner.

DAN M. GIBSON

"I used to sit out on my gallery all the time and enjoy a cup of tea," he says. "When the jasmine is blooming, it is intoxicating." Now that he's mayor, Gibson has a lot less downtime, but he still manages to relax on his porch when he can. "I usually catch a few quiet moments out there at night—and it's just as beautiful," he says. *natchezinsider.com*

Star-Studded Stay

Clark Gable often came to Garden-Song to visit his friend, Hollywood executive Sam Abbott, who grew up here. The actor's room of choice is now called the Clark Gable Suite.

Historic Oak Hill Inn

Chances are, even someone who grew up here in Natchez wouldn't find Oak Hill Inn if they weren't looking for it. This last block of Rankin Street is a dead-end stretch of road with just a handful of houses on it. As a result, Oak Hill, with its elegant front gallery and lush gardens, feels hushed and remote, though it's just a 10-minute walk from the center of town. Camellia bushes and live oaks draped with Spanish moss are everywhere. You'll also find angel's trumpets and a fountain

filled with frogs and lotus flowers. Under an arbor at the edge of the property is an antique aquarium (made of cast iron and glass) that is one of the oldest working examples of its kind. Stepping onto the grounds feels a bit like stumbling onto a movie set. So when hosts Doug Mauro (shown below left) and Don McGlynn (below right) hand you an icy mint julep and lead you to a chair on the gallery above the quiet neighborhood street, you accept your role as a pampered guest without protest.

This talented pair (Mauro is an expert gardener, and McGlynn is known for his gourmet breakfasts) is originally from New Jersey. When they discovered Natchez on vacation nearly two decades ago, they sold their house on the shore and never looked back. At the time, Oak Hill was in disrepair. "It took us two years to make it livable," recalls Mauro. "We'd already sold our house, so

we stayed here during the renovations, which I wouldn't recommend."

Built in 1835, the house still had its original cypress mantels, wide-plank cypress flooring, and transom windows above several doorways. The two opened their B&B at the end of 2006, and it's been a runaway success ever since. Today, Oak Hill regularly snags a spot on Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice Award's

list of the country's top B&Bs. In 2014, they were ranked third in the world.

The move to Natchez was intended to kick off the couple's retirement years, but that plan has since been scrapped. "We didn't expect any of this," explains McGlynn. "Running this place really is the perfect job, though. I don't have to get dressed up or commute, and we've met a lot of wonderful people. Some come back year after year, so now they're like family." historicoakhill.com

**DOUG
MAURO
& DON
MCGLYNN**



Happy Hour

Mint juleps on the veranda are an absolute must.

