

# Extraordinary Celebrations!

by Susan Spindler

## THROUGH THE GARDEN GATE



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The past three years, I have had the pleasure of going to Charleston, Beaufort, and Savannah at this time of the year. If you have not been, I encourage you to travel in the springtime into the glorious gardens of the south, enjoy the genteel hospitality, and learn more about the history of this very special area of our country.

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"Just one look  
is worth  
1,000  
words."

South Carolina was founded in 1670 by immigrants mostly from England. The industries that made the first significant wealth in this area were rice and indigo, which I was so surprised to learn as I just assumed it was cotton. At this time, South Carolina had the highest per capita income on the continent before the revolution.

During the Colonial period, the cultivation of indigo, from which blue dye was derived, was the favored cash crop. The increase and expansion of indigo producing in the area had accelerated the demand for slave labor. Grand periods of opulence and high living that followed reflect in the stately mansions and elegant plantations, which many of them you can now tour.

The south is famous for its incredible ironwork, with each of the above cities having a bit of distinction all their own. You can't speak about ironwork without giving homage to Charleston's own Philip Simmons. Simmons was trained as a blacksmith, but he realized that as times changed and automobiles became more common, decorative ironwork was the way of the future. In over a 40 year career, Philip Simmons turned out more than 200 gorgeous gates. He also made balconies, stair rails, window grills, and fences. As you tour through Charleston, you will see his work everywhere.

A Charleston Side, or Charleston Single, is a fine example of architecture that is unique to the area. It was designed to beat



Azaleas Galore in Savannah

the heat by catching cross breezes, which made for great ventilation. The open-air porch running the length of the house, called a piazza, is an important part of Charleston's lifestyle. The single house is only one room wide from the street. It is very humid and hot in the summer, so this was a great way before air conditioning to help keep cool.

Porches, locally known as piazzas, overlook the small, gorgeous gardens. Many of these piazzas are extensions of the main house, where by bringing the indoors out by hanging pictures, lamps, mirrors, potted plants, and flowers, and furniture, also make alfresco dining a pleasure!

Because of frequent fires, it became law that kitchen buildings had to be made of brick and placed ten feet from the main house. Behind the kitchen, each house had a carriage house and stables with servants on the second floor.

Charleston gardens are usually small gardens enclosed by vine-covered walls or walls of hedging, wrought iron gates and fences, decorative fountains and water features, statuary, benches, and a Japanese maple tree. Since space is usually at a minimum, these gardens have been referenced as "secret gardens," or garden rooms.

One cannot help but become enchanted by the beauty and the quaintness of the cobblestone streets, little alleyways, and palm trees. Moss draped oaks waving, palmettos, and crepe myrtles help to transform the secret gardens of the South, making one dream of garden parties and mint juleps!

When in Savannah, one of the first things you notice is the way the town has been developed around squares.

The Savannah Plan, as it was known, consisted of a series of wards built around central squares with trust lots on the east and west side for public buildings and churches, and for private homes on the north and south sides. It is what makes Savannah so unique.

Savannah's ironworks can be seen around its many squares, monuments, fountains, and stately mansions as well. The huge azalea bushes are found everywhere in all colors, and the wisteria vines had me spellbound. I wish all our springtime flowers had a longer blooming period so we could enjoy them longer. Resurrection ferns, found in the live oak trees, look like they are dead until a rainfall, and then they come alive and look amazing.

Savannah is renowned for incorporating more wrought iron work within its boundaries than any other city in America.

Beaufort is a low country city, and is the second oldest city behind Charleston. This coastal city is scenic and maintains its historic character. Today, they have horse drawn carriages that tour the beautiful historical homes and churches.

It is always of great interest to me see the different areas in the world and how, design-wise, they adapt to their culture and climate.

If you are looking for history, beauty, antiques, great restaurants, and walking tours galore, this is a remarkable retreat from everyday life.

Willow Bend resident, Susan Spindler, is an interior decorator, event and wedding planner, and the Collin County Ambassador to the RSVP Social Calendar ([www.rsvpcalendar.com](http://www.rsvpcalendar.com)). Enjoy Susan's blog at [www.susanspindlerdesigns.blogspot.com](http://www.susanspindlerdesigns.blogspot.com).

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