

Plantation Point Nursery: A Very Special Place

BY HARRY WOLFORD*

During the 20 or so years that I've been visiting with iris lovers, I've had the pleasure of seeing some very interesting gardens—some small, some large, and some “special.” Plantation Point Nursery, 10325 Caddo Lake Rd., Mooringsport, LA 71060, falls heavily into two of these categories... large and “special.” The problem with many large “nursery type” gardens is that they do not have the charm that makes them special. Plantation Point is a definite exception.

Upon driving through the beautiful iron gates leading to the main house that Bobbie Hutchins and her husband, Stan Schikowitz, M.D., are building on the Caddo Lake property, one immediately understands that this is a “labor of love,” with commercial considerations being secondary. With some 22 acres with which to work, Bobbie, her brother Ron Killingsworth, and Ron's wife Sue, truly iris lovers in every sense (I'm told that Stan is rapidly acquiring the passion), have arranged the large plantings of Louisiana irises for maximum viewing by visitors. They are greatly assisted by the caretaker, Martin Kelly.

In addition to appreciating the layout of this garden, I was also quite impressed with the cultivation and

quality of the plants at Plantation Point. It's more than obvious that these folks know how to grow Louisiana irises. Ron told us that he hauls hundreds of cubic yards of a cotton processing by-product from a nearby gin. He builds this into large mounds around the property and lets it decompose into a great compost. The beds are then constructed and the soil heavily amended with the compost. An impressive irrigation system has been constructed using water from nearby Caddo Lake and the irises are kept moist at all times. The beds are also heavily mulched with pine straw and there is not a weed in sight.

Bobbie started building her “dream” by purchasing all of the irises that were available when the Lone Star Garden of Garland, Texas closed its doors. Since that garden had been left unattended for a period of time, identity of cultivars growing there had been compromised. In an effort to begin sorting things out, as the plants were removed from Lone Star, they were



kept in groups as they were dug and replanted in the same groups at Plantation Point. The past two years have been spent blooming, identifying, and marking these cultivars. In addition to the Lone Star plants, Bobbie and Ron also dug plants from Marie Caillet's famous “pond” in Little Elm, Texas. Everyone who has visited Marie's garden knows that she does not attempt to maintain identity records of irises growing in the pond—doing so only in the beds in her garden. So in addition to the identification project with the Lone Star irises, the folks at Plantation Point have also been busy identifying the irises from Marie's pond. It's a slow

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Ron Killingsworth and Bobbie Ann Hutchins
Photo by Tim Nutt



A sea of color envelopes Plantation Point when the Louisiana irises are in bloom.
Photo by Tim Nutt

process, but progress is being made. Bobbie feels that the process is well worth it since Lone Star grew many of the older, hard-to-find cultivars and she wants to preserve these desperately.

Iris from the two sources described above are planted primarily in the middle of the 22 acres at Plantation Point. Immediately around the lake behind the new house Bobbie is building, however, are beds containing many named cultivars they have purchased from other growers. New beds are also being constructed between their greenhouse and the edge of the lake for plants that they will add in 2004.

Plantation Point is built on property that was once a youth summer camp. The camp consisted of a dining hall and several cottages for housing disadvantaged young people from nearby Shreveport. Bobbie and Stan purchased the land in 1995. They cleared away the old dining hall on the banks of the lake and are in the process of building a beautiful home for retirement once Stan leaves his medical practice. Ron, a retired U.S. Army



This was a beautiful stand of 'Atchafalaya.' The author grows this iris, but he points out "Not like this!"

Photo by Harry Wolford

Warrant Officer, has a beautiful home built from cedar wood on the opposite end of the property. Both homes have a beautiful view overlooking their expanse of irises. The cottages that were on the property have been

preserved and remodeled and there are plans for each. One very interesting plan involves a project Stan has started—marketing gourmet coffee. Raw coffee beans are imported through New Orleans from various parts of the



The greenhouse at Plantation Point is modeled on classic 19th-Century English “orangeries.”

Photo by Tim Nutt



Evidence of Plantation Point Nursery’s former incarnation as a youth camp is evident by the cabins that are still located on the property.

Photo by Tim Nutt



The extensive iris beds provide the perfect setting for the grand residence at Plantation Point.

Photo by Tim Nutt



The beds of irises at Plantation Point surround the banks of Lake Caddo.

Photo by Tim Nutt

world, roasted in rosters on the site, and shipped to customers all around the U.S. We had samples of some of their blends and I can tell you that they are as skilled in roasting coffee as they are in growing irises!

Our visit to Plantation Point on our return from the 2004 Society for Louisiana Irises convention in Dallas lasted about 4 hours...3 hours longer than we planned on. There is no way one can cover this garden in four hours, much less one! So we’re planning to return for at least a day very, very soon. The garden is truly beautiful and the hospitality is great. It’s definitely worth a drive to Mooringsport, LA!



Beds of irises at Plantation Point Nursery.

Photo by Tim Nutt