

COASTAL CAROLINA

# HOMESTYLES

January | February 2007

## Ocean Views

A preview of the  
2007 Tour of Homes

### Oh, Romeo!

Tips for a romantic bedroom  
and a B&B getaway

### Extreme Kitchen Makeover

A before and after that goes from old to bold







# Mansfield

## PLANTATION

ROMANCE, HISTORY, INTRIGUE

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*The sights and sounds along the banks of the Black River, which once yielded millions of pounds of rice centuries ago, is a soothing lullaby any time of day at Mansfield Plantation.*





Afternoon sunshine winks above the canopy of live oaks and Spanish moss that hug the mile-and-a-half-long dirt lane entrance to Mansfield Plantation, Georgetown.

I'm sitting next to my husband in his Canyon pickup as we anticipate a quiet, romantic weekend getaway at this historic plantation-turned-bed & breakfast. We ramble past acres of thick woods, low-lying centuries-old brick hedges and bridges, and a pair of brick pillars with mounted wrought-iron lanterns that announce the gateway to the main house.

Romance is a state of mind one can't help but embrace on these hallowed grounds. 1756 landowner Susannah LaRoach Man, a widow of Dr. John Man, first began construction of a house and lovingly named the 500-acre property "Mansfield" after her late husband. "It's the setting, the history, the magical realm," owner John Rutledge Parker tells me later in his sitting room. "People don't know what to expect when they arrive for a weekend getaway."

Parker is an auto dealer in Asheville, N.C., when he's not in Georgetown. His significance to Mansfield is an integral part of that magic spell he mentions. His ancestors lived, breathed, farmed the rice, were schooled and raised their families on this land.

In 1836, Dr. Simons Parker of Charleston married Mary Taylor Lance of Mansfield Plantation (a portrait of the doctor in the dining room of the main house bears a striking resemblance to John Rutledge) and,



with his keen scientific background, Parker quickly mastered a way to increase annual rice yields to nearly 1.5 million pounds in 1860 by, incidentally, using bat dung as fertilizer. (Parker found that there was more money to be made with rice fields than in the medical field, as Georgetown was hailed the "rice capital of the world" at that time.) The Parkers were quite ambitious, as they added a wing to the main house, built a schoolhouse for their nine children and were said to have planted with their own hands many of the live oaks and camellias that line the entrance lane and path to the winnowing barn.

Although times were good pre-Civil War, the Southern way of living soon became unsettled, as history goes. Dr. Parker followed in the footsteps of those Parker patriarchs before him – signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution – by signing the South Carolina Ordinance of Secession on Dec. 20, 1860, in Institute Hall in Charleston. During the war, Parker also served as provost marshal for Georgetown. He died in 1867, some say of a broken heart over those troubling times.





In 1912, rice was no longer produced at Mansfield. Heirs of **Arthur Middleton Parker**, one of Dr. Parker's sons, sold the land after 156 years of family ownership. It wasn't until 2004 that Mansfield was returned to the **Parker** legacy, when John Rutledge Parker and his wife, Sallie Middleton Parker, purchased from Sarah "Sally" Smith Cahalan the plantation that today includes nearly 1,000 acres. Miraculously, none of this historic property fell to the hands of developers since its original land grant in 1712 along the Black River.

**Cahalan** had begun operating Mansfield as a **B&B**, and the Parkers also continue to **effortlessly** run Mansfield as such, **along with the essential assistance of innkeeper Kathryn Green**. **Proceeds** from their profits are being donated to the renovation of yet **another strong** testament of time: a cluster of **slave cabins** and chapel **situated** just **beyond the pillar entrance**. **White paint** is peeling from the siding of these **crude shelters**, roofs are bowed and warped, **and** an old church bell stripped from its steeple sits among the high grasses.

Rebecca Goldin, whose grandfather was a slave at Mansfield, was John Rutledge's nanny (as well as his father's and grandfather's nanny). "She's my closest connection to my ancestors here," he says. "She would tell me that my great-grandfather would



*Left: The Mann Room in the North Guesthouse, circa 1930s, boasts ornate moulding, Victorian furnishings and modern amenities.*

*Above: The Old Kitchen, built circa 1800, was located away from the main house as a fire precaution. Today, two guest rooms, Izard and Simons, occupy the brick structure that overlooks the marsh.*





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*Above: The brick pillar main entrance on the "Live Oak Street" or Mansfield Road, is more than 1 1/2 miles long through acres of woods and past remnants of history such as slave cabins and the winnowing barn.*

*Opposite: The comfortably elegant main house dates back to 1756, when Susannah LaRoach Man first began construction.*

always say, "Never look back!"

Flashing forward from their rice plantation roots, Mansfield's forefathers would be pleased with the manor's status today. Mansfield is a member of the National Register of Historic Places and touted as "one of the most architecturally intact rice plantations in South Carolina." The old kitchen house (circa 1800), overlooking the serene marsh, and schoolhouse (1840s) were converted into cozy guesthouses. The schoolhouse, closest to the main house, is complete with a front porch and rocking chairs – perfect for sipping morning coffee and bird-watching.

We're staying at the North Guesthouse, still within walking distance along hand-laid brick walkways to the main house. Built later in the 1930s as a guesthouse for hunting groups, this majestic brick cottage houses two guest rooms in the rear (we stayed in the Mann Room) and two more upstairs around the front entrance, a gothic double staircase that frames a trickling water fountain. Our room is a refreshing haven in baby blue, with vintage blue-and-white linens draped on the four-poster king-size bed and just a spice of scarlet on the Victorian day-enoport, bench and lamps. The intricate crown moulding, deep-set windowsills filled with a vase of fresh flowers, Sallie Middleton (Sallie's

mother) wildlife watercolor prints and fireplace are tastefully exquisite.

Our romantic evening, after dinner at the River Room along Georgetown's historic Front Street, includes uncorking a bottle of champagne kept chilled in the mini-fridge and taking in a DVD ("The Patriot," which was filmed here on location in 2000). Before that, however, star-gazing to the sonata of crickets has never been more magnificent than in a hammock along the banks of the Black River in Mansfield's backyard. The next time we visit, I want to take advantage of snuggling up to the fire pit surrounded by a circle of giant Adirondack chairs just outside the Mann Room on the fan-shaped brick patio. And I'll probably leave our adorable (but high-energy) Jack Russell, George, at home – although it's nice to know that Mansfield is pet-friendly.

The next morning, awakening to sunlight peeking through the Venetian blinds and birds chirping, we dodge lawn sprinklers and walked to the main house, a comfortably elegant plantation home featuring the finest in antebellum architecture. The 4,000-square-foot manor is where we are all to have breakfast with the other guests at the dining room elaborately set with china and polished silver. Green prepared





a fabulous feast of cheesy egg casserole, biscuits, sausage and ham – just the energy we need to later explore trails around the stables and winnowing barn on bicycles supplied by Mansfield. After reading about it in some literature in our room, we wanted to find the barn area where movie props from “The Patriot” were stored. The NBC reality TV show “Treasure Hunters” was also filmed at Mansfield in early 2006.

The simple, peaceful surroundings and magical history of Mansfield make it a romantic retreat for couples to take a deep breath, relax and escape to a fascinating time set centuries ago down a mile-and-a-half-long dirt lane. It is, in fact, listed as one of [bedandbreakfast.com](http://bedandbreakfast.com)'s picks for “best undiscovered inns for romance.” And one worth discovering.

*For reservations and romantic packages, visit [www.mansfieldplantation.com](http://www.mansfieldplantation.com) or call 1-866-717-1776. Mansfield is located at 1776 Mansfield Road, Georgetown, off Highway 701. 🏠*