one-tank trips
by Patricia Gannon

If These Walls Could Talk
Chances are, they'd speak in romantic whispers.

Bed-and-breakfast owners are a bold and enterprising bunch. Friendly, too — as a travel writer I get invited to a lot of sleepovers. I've never accepted, not because five-star hotels have spoiled me (I wish — they never call), but because I've bed-and-breakfasted my way through Europe, and I can tell right away if you're just another pretty space.

Chris and Stephanie Baker prove my point. In less than an hour, I knew Cajun Country Cottages was a great getaway, and that I didn't have to so much as sit on a bedspread to find out.

I was hooked as soon as I heard about the main house.

"We found it in the Quiet Quarter," says Chris. "It was used, abused and getting ready to crumble. I saved it from being torn down and sold in pieces."

The 1830 LaLonde home was moved from Leotielle to what was to be the old Magenta Plantation in Breaux Bridge, leaving a trail of bushes behind it.

"I was fortunate to find it — I love history and restoration," he says. "Taking it apart, seeing how it was made — I could really see the incredible craftsmanship. You can visualize who made it."

His wife did not visualize that he'd have to wake up before dawn and work until after dark, or that he'd drop 15 pounds. Nor that she'd be delivering full breakfasts for a year and a half to guests while the dining room awaits completion.

"They're starting to get spoiled," she says. "I may have to deliver door-to-door forever."

Spoiled guests stay in their own historic buildings nearby, and the largest of the five, Evangeline, is a turn-of-the-century farm building with all the antique appointments of Grandma's house. Schoolhouse is just that — a 19th-century, one-room school that was moved from Washington; Farmhouse (not to be confused with the farm building) is actually a sharecropper's cabin, with a few interior walls added to the original structure, but guests can still see the original stove vent in the ceiling in what is now the bathroom; and Little Cypress, a reproduction structure that's a favorite among couples for its loft and wooden deck that leads down to the lake.

I realize that's only four, but there's one that deserves special attention.

Playhouse is a little girl's playhouse from 1903, and the slightly smaller-than-average scale will have you feeling just like Alice in Wonderland. I couldn't resist the high iron bed and rose-colored velvet chairs, romantically placed under a diminutive crystal chandelier for two. Apparently, I'm not the only one. A husband, celebrating his anniversary with champagne on the lake, once left this grateful message in the guestbook the following morning: "Thank you, Playhouse."

Other guests can expect to be rejuvenated and restored as well, like the couple from Sweden who wrote: "We had to come all this way to find this place. You made it worth the effort."

Playhouse has to say.

"I always wanted to live in an old house," he says. "I love to lie in my bed at night and look at this old ceiling. If these walls could talk..."

Yes, indeed. I'd love to know what Playhouse has to say.

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