As a memorial to Dr. George B. Crozat, for the years of love and devotion he gave to restoring Houmas House, his heirs have decided that this historic home should be shared with all who appreciate fine architecture, outstanding furnishings and beautiful gardens. It is now open to the public for the first time in its 171 year history.

on the River Road
Burnside, Louisiana
Picturesque, hexagonal brick garconnieres stand at each side of the mansion. In the days when visitors had to travel long distances by riverboat or horseback, they usually had to remain overnight. These structures housed the visiting "garcons."

Houmas House derives its name from the Houmas Indians, who originally held this strip of land located at a point in the river that affords a commanding view for several miles up and down the mighty Mississippi.

Colonial archives show that Houmas Plantation was part of a land grant to the Marquis d'Autonis (Maurice Conway) and Alexandre Latil. Latil built the rear house in the last quarter of the eighteenth century while Louisiana was under Spanish domination. The original structure has many Spanish characteristics. It also resembles houses built in rural France during this period.

In 1812, the tract was purchased by the famous Revolutionary War hero, General Wade Hampton of South Carolina from Daniel Clark. The General's daughter, Caroline, married John Smith Preston. They came from Carolina to supervise the Louisiana properties of the Hampetons. In 1840, the Prestons built the magnificent Greek Revival mansion known as Houmas House. Wisely, they preserved the original four-room dwelling at the rear, which was later attached to the great house by an arched carriage way.

In 1857, the Prestons sold the house and 10,000 acres for approximately two million dollars to an Irishman, John Burnside. Under his able direction, Houmas Plantation grew to 20,000 acres. Vast fields of sugar cane were planted and four mills were built to process the cane. Possession of Houmas Plantation made its owner the prime sugar producer in America.

The War between the States brought hard times to Houmas Plantation, but nothing to compare with the fate that befell neighboring properties. When General Benjamin Butler tried to occupy Burnside's plantation, he declared his immunity as a British subject. Burnside won his point and Houmas was spared disastrous occupation by the Union forces and the ravages of war that other plantations suffered.

In 1881, Burnside died and the property passed to the Bierne family, then to Col. William Porcher Miles. Under the Miles ownership, the plantation again flourished. Soon it was producing twenty million pounds of sugar a year. After Miles died in 1899, most of the plantation lands were sold and the grand old home fell into a state of disrepair.

In 1940 the house and remaining grounds were purchased from the Miles family by Dr. George B. Crozat of New Orleans. Curiously enough, maps in the upper hall of Houmas House show on September 14, 1712, the King of France, Louis XIV granted exclusive trading rights to all the lands drained by the Mississippi River to Monsieur Antoine Crozat. Now the Houmas grounds returned to the Crozat family. Dr. Crozat devoted the last quarter century of his life toward restoring the house and gardens to their former grandeur. Over the years, previous owners had added various ostentatious decorations. These were stripped away in an effort to restore the simple magnificence the home possessed in 1840. All will agree that few antebellum homes have been restored as graciously and as authentically as Houmas House.

Most of the furnishings of Houmas House — museum pieces of early Louisiana craftsmanship — were chosen by Dr. Crozat to reflect the period prior to 1840. Many antiques came from the Crozat family home in New Orleans. Of special interest is the unsurpassed collection of armoires, decorative wooden wardrobes for holding clothing.

Dr. Crozat was a man of many talents. He rejuvenated the gardens and designed many new ones. Most of the plants are indigenous to the area. The scent of sweet olive permeates the formal garden. Fifteen feet high azaleas form a colorful background for the "Four Seasons" statues of Carrara marble. Magnolia trees bloom thirty feet in the air. Of the majestic moss-laden live oaks, one is over 200 years old and measures twenty-five feet in circumference.

All photographs by Robert H. Potts, Jr., M.D.
Of note in the Empire dining room are the Signoret type chairs and the matched serving tables with petticoat mirrors.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Houmas House has been featured over the past few years in National Geographic, Life, House Beautiful, House and Garden, Ladies Home Journal and Holiday Magazines. It was the setting for the movie "Hush Hush, Sweet Charlotte," starring Betty Davis, Olivia DeHaviland and Joseph Cotten.

It would be impossible, in this small brochure, to list all the books featuring Houmas House. You will enjoy reading about Houmas House in some of these notable books:

- The Second Treasury of Early American Homes—Dorothy and Richard Pratt
- Plantation Parade—Harnett Kane
- All This Is Louisiana—Francis Parkinson Keyes
- Old Louisiana Plantation Homes and Family Trees—Herman Seebold, M.D.
- Ghosts Along the Mississippi—Clarence John Laughlin
- Louisiana Gallery—Phillip Kappel
- Louisiana Plantation Homes—W. Darrell Overdyke
- Vignettes of Louisiana History—Louisiana Pen Women
- Louisiana: Sketches of Historical Homes and Sights—Mrs. D. N. Hayes

Then when your reading has further intrigued you, come to enjoy, with your own eyes, the glories of Houmas House!