

Garden in the Bayou or Bayou in the Garden: Design Provenance and Environmental Adaptation at Le Petit Versailles

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Tracing the design provenance and formal evolution of a garden provides a fairly narrow understanding of the garden as place. A garden is conditioned by site-specific environmental factors, as well as by broader patterns of cultural inheritance. In fact, a garden's long-term physical survival is determined as much by adaptability to localised environmental context as by sustained recognition of cultural significance. Indeed, a garden may display elements of a recognised design tradition and still be largely vernacular in its environmental expression.

DRAWING ON ARCHIVAL AND FIELD RESEARCH conducted during 2001–2002 at Le Petit Versailles, the antebellum garden of Creole planter Valcour Aime (1797–1867), the author illustrates that the distinction between high-style and vernacular landscape is rarely discrete, and that much of the garden's significance resides in its localised peculiarity, not in its global representativeness. For landscape historians, the tendency to categorise gardens first and foremost by formal content and cultural context may cause us to overlook a work's more subtle environmental adaptations, and a potential source of significance.

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