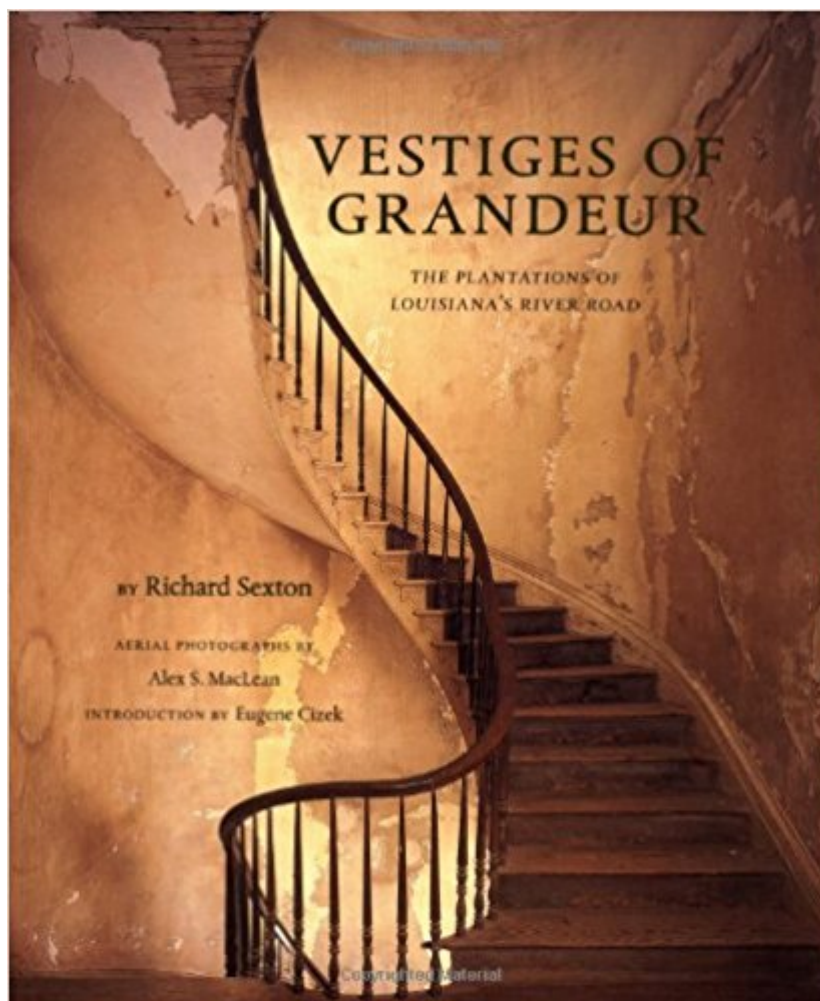


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Vestiges Of Grandeur: Plantations Of Louisiana's River Road



Synopsis

In an evocative sequel to the acclaimed *New Orleans: Elegance and Decadence*, author and photographer Richard Sexton returns with an in-depth visual journey through the hidden mansions—some inhabited, many now long abandoned—of Louisiana's River Road. Bordering the Mississippi, these antebellum landmarks were once the epitome of gracious living in the Deep South. Over the past century, these grand dwellings have slowly succumbed to time, humidity, and the reclamation of the land: first by nature, then by real-estate developers who built subdivisions, oil refineries, and strip malls where curtains of Spanish moss once swayed from the live oaks. This collection—featuring over 200 haunting color photographs with extensive captions explaining the architectural significance and history of each structure—is a beautiful elegy for a rapidly disappearing landscape and its ghosts.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1716 John Law, in what McCaffety calls a "real-estate scam," persuaded the Duc d'Orleans to sell shares for a French settlement. A flood wiped out the settlement in the first year, but the colonists continued to come. By the mid-19th century, New Orleans was the busiest port in the world, with a strange alchemy of European, Caribbean, and American influences in character and architecture that is totally unique. NPR's recent report on the damage done in Louisiana and particularly in New Orleans by the voracious Formosa termite makes viewing these two books of stylish photography even more poignant. Award-winning photographer McCaffety (*Obituary Cocktail: The Great Saloons of New Orleans*) lovingly records scenes of luxury and decay in the

Vieux Carré or the French Quarter of New Orleans. McCafferty offers the reader views that elude the countless tourists. We are privy to private, antiques-filled residences, walled courtyards with balconies and fountains, lush tropical gardens--what she calls "the city's hidden memory." Sexton's work looks at "the River Road," a stretch of highway that links New Orleans to Baton Rouge. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has identified the area as one of the most endangered historic sites in the United States. Law's influence was shown here also, as he was given a charter to increase the French population to 10,000 in a ten-year period. Likewise, a distinctive architecture evolved here: the plantation on the river with a dominant main house. Much of the style is still around, and with aerial photographer Alex MacLean, Sexton captures the grandeur. We see standing chimneys from lost glorious homes, stately houses still active and enjoyed, and plantations of historical note. Sexton also shows other notable architecture and its geography--tenement "shotgun" houses, cemeteries, churches, steamboat landings, levees, swamp, sugarcane, and massive oaks hanging with Spanish Moss are occasionally interspersed by abandoned oil refineries and massive new petro-chemical operations. Both of these books are essential regional purchases, but they are also highly recommended for architecture, photography, and history collections everywhere.-Joseph C. Hewgley, Nashville P.L. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

No one interested in Louisiana history should fail to get a copy of this book. It's not just pretty pictures. This might be the one coffee-table book that you want to give as a Christmas present this year. Do yourself a favor and take a look at it. -- Baton Rouge Advocate

This is no ordinary picture book. It's a complete history of River Road plantation life, told with engaging depth, startling photography, and profound cultural insight. It is a narrative study, every bit an exercise in sociology as in history and architecture. This book is so good it's hard to know whether to praise the beautiful illustration - a combination of photography and other graphics - or the engaging text. This is a book that has obviously been prepared as a serious study, and will be useful to architectural historians, architects, and local historians, as well as curious general readers. It is not an architectural catalog, but is a narrative featuring discussion of about 20 of the most important River Road sites, most of which are still standing. The book is organized into chapters dedicated to exterior styles, interior details and design, and landscaping. This book was published in 1999, when many of the houses featured were in desperate need of restoration. The reader will find the dilapidated state of some of the structures either quaint or alarming, depending on the attitude toward restoration. Some of the houses shown here have been restored, and some

were damaged in hurricane Katrina, which happened six years after this book was published. For me, the most outstanding things about the book are the dazzling aerial photographs and the rigor of the sociological analysis. It's showing its age a bit, but this is still a fantastic book, especially for students of River Road history, architectural history, and for committed amateurs.

I certainly agree with the other reviewers that praise the photography and selection of the images in this book. But there are also unique insights into the lives and culture of the people who lived and worked on these plantations. Photographs and biographies reveal how the plantation world functioned. A baby's cradle and a prie dieu bring out in a very human way the lives of the individuals involved in the history of this lost world. Astonishing aerial photos show historic homes cheek by jowl with oil refineries, illustrating the enormous risks that face the historic plantations today and tomorrow. Then there are the simple, humble, small-scale images of domestic life, such as page 206 that displays a picture entitled "Louisiana ducks roasting on the open hearth at Destreham plantation. Sweet potatoes bake in the hot embers below the fire." In an instant my mind flashes back more than a century and I can almost see the ghosts. It's difficult to describe the special charm of this book, but I can assure you that you're in for a unique experience if you read it. The much overused word ESSENTIAL is truly authentic in this case. One feels that veils are lifted and a vital new understanding has been achieved.

In a way this is a heartbreaking book, because so many of these spectacular plantation houses are in precarious or ruinous shape -- on the other hand, the way of life they represent -- of slavery and oppression and people worked to death in the fields -- is gone now. The owners used their money on houses designed to impress each other, and each brick and nail and window represents beauty bought by blood. Yes, they are beautiful. Some are preserved and lived in. Others are sinking into the silt.

I bought this as a Christmas gift for my mother. She loves the larger print and says the author is a refreshing and welcome change to the "flowery" descriptions given in other author's books.

Got this for my parents for a Christmas present. They loved it! Beautiful pictures in a wonderful book. Lots of diversity in pictures and brilliant colors.

This book is a classic. It has the most beautiful, elegant photographs of Antebellum homes on

Louisiana's River Road. I bought this book for my mom, and she instantly loved it. It made great Mother's Day gift! A must have for anyone into Louisiana's great plantations!

This book was too intriguing to pass on, and I am glad I didn't. It is gloriously beautiful and heartbreaking at the same time.

Love having this book @ one of our lake houses for guests. We are enjoying reading & learning in photos so much history on these plantations. The author A++ on his subject

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