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## Great American HOMES

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COAST CLASSICS  
AND THE FAMILIES  
WHO ADORE THEM



HUNT SLONEM  
AT HOME: GHOST  
STORIES & ART IN THE  
LOUISIANA BAYOU







## Host with the Most

Artist Hunt Slonem loves to entertain at his historic house on the bayou

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People from all over cherish the invitation to visit Albania, artist Hunt Slonem's circa-1850 plantation house situated deep in the Louisiana bayou. I was lucky enough to be one of them recently when 20 guests gathered for dinner—some of us for a sleepover—at the elegant Greek Revival home near the small community of Jeanerette.

Live oaks with dangling tendrils swaying in the breeze on the well-tended grounds set the scene for arriving guests. A massive floating, circular stairway in the center hall greeted us inside the 12,000-square-foot home filled with portraits and choice 19th-century antiques.

We didn't yet know the house may well be haunted—something we learned only after we had picked our guest rooms. Nonetheless, we were in for a meal and a stay we all deemed extraordinary.

The guest list equaled the home's pedigree. One of the revelers founded his own museum—Mitchell “Micky” Wolfson, of Miami's eclectic Wolfsonian. “This house is legendary,” said Wolfson as he walked in. Also on hand was Ashton Hawkins, former special counsel to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a longtime confidante of New York's top collectors, plus Slonem's dear friend Angèle Parlange, member of a prominent old Louisiana family.

Albania, about two hours from New Orleans, is actually Slonem's second plantation, the other being Lakeside in Pointe Coupee Parish. “That one *really* goes on forever,” Slonem says, which makes the mind reel. The gregarious, energetic artist, nominally based in Manhattan, has three more historic houses, including the Woolworth mansion in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

It's safe to say he's from the “more is more” school of thought. “People always ask, ‘Why do you have two plantations?’” Slonem told me, setting up a practiced line. “Because I can't afford 10.”

In keeping with his lifestyle, his art takes profusion and abundance as its ➤

Artist Hunt Slonem pauses on the spectacular spiral staircase that winds up three stories in his Louisiana plantation home called Albania. He frequently entertains visitors who marvel at both his home and his artwork displayed there.





“I FIND THESE AQUAS ARE LIKE ICE CUBES. THEY DON’T WARM UP THE SPACE.” —Hunt Slonem

subjects. Slonem, 64, paints colorful, impressionistic canvases filled with multiple bunnies, butterflies, parrots—you name it. And his Warhol-inspired work has catapulted him into the collections of 120 of the world’s top museums. His own canvases are interspersed throughout Albania. He loves painting the slender arm of the Bayou Teche waterway that’s right behind the house.

“Hunt is just as interested in historical portraits and history as in his own work,” confided Parlange, who met Slonem after he bought Lakeside, located near her family’s Parlange plantation, where she grew up. “I’m convinced it informs his art and his originality.”

Slonem has deep family roots in the South. “This is sugar country,” he says, recounting the history and fortunes of the Grevenberg family, who built Albania. He bought it in 1996 from an elderly widow who firmly held that it was haunted.

“It’s everything I ever wanted,” he said, gesturing toward one of its treasures—an Egyptian marble mantel in the study.

Slonem has been restoring the home for almost 20 years, but his primary interest seems to be filling it with prized finds. His friend Beth Fuller, a dinner guest from Baton Rouge, says of Slonem’s never-ending antiques: “He can scan a room and immediately hit on the one quality thing.”

Notably, Slonem purchased some 85 pieces of Gothic Revival objects, many of them chairs, from the collection of Lee Anderson, a personal friend and one of the field’s great connoisseurs, at the auction house Doyle New York.

Albania also is home to several pieces of rich mahogany furniture attributed to Louisiana’s legendary Prudent Mallard, a 19th-century New Orleans merchant and furniture dealer. A particular standout is a tester bed with a dramatically cantilevered canopy.

Portraits are a passion for Slonem—and it makes sense, given how social he is, that faces populate his walls. The noble visage of French aristocrat and Revolutionary War

Guests gather in the mansion’s aqua-hued dining room for a convivial dinner after careful preparation of the table. Slonem says it took 10 years to find the right color for the room—a customized version of Sherwin-Williams’s “Light Calypso.”





Library Slonem is passionate about color and chose Sherwin-Williams's "Solaria." Silverware Ornate "Marly" design by Christofle. Bedroom A 19th-century copy of Bellini's *Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan* graces the bedroom. Hallway A grouping of Slonem's iconic bunny paintings adorns this wall, but you can get the look with "Bunny Wall," a Lee Jofa wallpaper from its Groundworks collection.







hero Marquis de Lafayette looked on us in the dining room as we feasted on the delicious fare. (He seemed to approve.)

With its multicolored interiors and eccentric mix of collecting and decorating ("collecting"), Albania is an artwork. Slonem has spent years perfecting the colors. "These aquas are like ice cubes," he said, referring to the dining room's turquoise hue. "They don't warm up the space." And in Louisiana's sweltering summers, that helps.

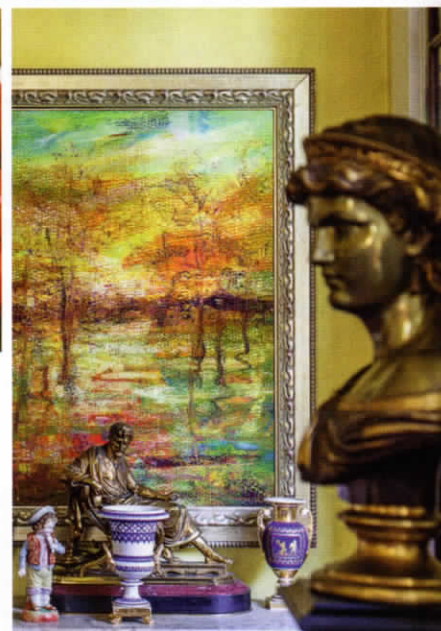
Eventually, those of us who were staying retired to our guest rooms. Mine featured Kelly-green walls and an enormous canopy above my bed. The night passed without incident—or so I thought.



A few weeks later, I wrote to Parlange to ask her for thoughts on her stay at Albania. She e-mailed, "No ghost sightings by me. UNLESS that wasn't you who blew in my room in the wee hours of the morning?"

Chalk it up to the mystery and magic of Albania Plantation. ■

For more information, see sources on page 121



Guest bedroom Parrot-green walls, a rococo center table by Alexander Roux, and a half-tester bed by 19th-century New Orleans craftsman William McCracken grace the room. Fountain Slonem found the lovely fountain in Natchez. Painting The nearby Bayou Teche waterway is one of the artist's favorite subjects. Flowers Floating camellia blooms.