



Laura Plantation, Vacherie, Louisiana, U.S.A. © 2019 Ehlinger & Associates

LAURA PLANTATION, Vacherie, Louisiana

Laura is located in Vacherie in St. James Parish on the west bank of the Mississippi River. The view of a sketch by Ladd P. Ehlinger is of the front, north facade. Laura Plantation has a fascinating varied history involving architectural history, African folk tales, and Louisiana inheritance lore.

Architecturally, this plantation house was built in the French colonial island style in 1804-05 by its first owners, the Guillaume Duparc family, and it was called the Duparc Plantation. They were Creoles (of French and Spanish blood, born in the new world) and acquired the land in a land grant from Thomas Jefferson in return for Guillaume Duparc's naval services in the U. S. Revolutionary War. The name was later changed to "Laura" in honor of Laura Duparc, the last Duparc family member who ran the plantation for the longest period of time after which it was sold to others. The planning of the house was in the French style with interconnected rooms and no halls anywhere. The house was originally "U" shaped in plan with two

wings to the rear, and a separate building centered on the "U" for the Kitchen, to prevent fire in the main house. The construction was brick masonry on the ground floor basement founded in the ground on pyramidal brick footings, and brick floors with *bricquette-entre-poteaux* (brick between posts) on the second level walls, which were plastered over, and wood beams and Norman roof truss that were prefabricated off-site, and assembled on site. There is a front and a rear porch, each of wood. The entire facility is very similar to Madame John's Legacy, the subject of a previous newsletter.

There are many out buildings that remain on the site: slave cabins (lived in until 1977), a *maison de reprise* (retirement home), communal kitchens,, a slave infirmary, and several water wells.

Its interesting that the modern French meaning of "vacherie", the unincorporated area where Laura is located, is to either play a dirty trick on someone or to make a nasty or catty remark about someone. Today, one can buy in Paris decorated

painted dinner plates for display that have painted on them "vacheries". It has been speculated that in archaic French of the 18th century, vacherie may have also meant a place of cows or dairy.

Alcée Fortier was born on Petit Versailles, his family's plantation nearby to Laura Plantation, was a Creole himself, and spoke several languages. He became a Professor of Romance Languages and History at what is now Tulane University in New Orleans. He recorded and published stories of freed slaves of Laura Plantation beginning in the early 1870s. These were African folk tales mostly from Senegal, that were kept alive in their oral history. In French, they were about Frère Lapin and Frère Renard - in English in dialect: Br'er Rabbit and Br'er Fox. Fortier's scholarly work preceded the fictional work of Joel Chandler Harris, published in the 1890s, which Disney made into a movie in 1946: "Song of the South" featuring "Uncle Remus".

WELCOME ABOARD

Mallory Glueck is our newest employee and a New Orleans native. She received her first degree magna cum laude from Delgado Community College (2011). Then went on to the University of Louisiana Lafayette where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Architecture (2016) and a Masters of Architecture (2018). Mallory holds technical certifications in computer aided design and drafting, environmental design, as well as millwork carpentry. Mallory's grandfather and father owned a sheetrock company while she was growing up, providing years of first-hand experience on construction sites since childhood. Combined with Mallory's mother being a civil engineering technician for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, one could say Mallory was raised to be an architect. When she's not pursuing her dream of becoming a licensed Architect, she spends her down time swimming, fishing at the lake or going to the beach. She is the definition of a Pisces, and loves being surrounded by water.



Station Retro, an Adaptive Reuse by Perrin Ehlinger

Recently, Ehlinger & Associates was hired to convert an old Advance Auto Parts location into a new-concept outlet, combining retail, casual dining, and gaming, called Station Retro. They sell vinyl records, CD's, DVD's, Blu-ray, video games, along with plastic models and supplies, and board and card games. They host gaming and trivia events in the dining area, as well as have model building and painting nights, and other activities. It was a truly novel concept, with some very specific space planning needs.

Adaptive reuse of older structures can be difficult, as there is no control of the location of existing utilities and restrooms, and in this situation there was the added difficulty of a limited budget, and tightly constraining building code issues.

We started with two toilet rooms, which became the limit for how many people the facility could hold, as there was not enough in the budget to add toilet fixtures. This limited the dining area to seat <50 people, and the entire space to <200 people, but this was within the client's projected range, so we could proceed.

Because of the location of the plumbing, the kitchen had to be placed near the restrooms to avoid cutting large amounts of the concrete slab. We ran into several difficulties, beginning with local regulations requiring a grease trap 150 times larger than the building code or State health department required for this small sized facility. This surprise nearly drained the entire reserve budget to accommodate.

This change then led to the grease trap being buried too low to gravity drain, because the existing lines were buried too shallow, so a grinder pump had to be added to the line.

Once past this, we then had several unique requests from the client - they wanted power to each of their tables, but nothing overhead. The entire dining area was raised from the slab on a system of furring and plywood, so that both power and internet could be run to each table, to provide the best gaming experience to their customers, while also meeting fire safety requirements.

Our client was custom building all of their display furniture and tables, using a large table CNC (Computer Numerical Control) routing machine, so the first area that was completed was the storage room, where the CNC equipment (all 15,000 pounds of it) could be set up and running while the rest of the construction proceeded.

Due to this unique customization, the floor plan had to be flexible during construction, as changes were being made to

the display racks and furniture as they were being built.

The interior space planning and design was intended to evoke a 'retro' feel, harking to the optimistic futurism of the 60's, incorporating bright colors, and a harsh contrast between the use of the spaces, so each element (retail, dining, ordering) can be considered as its own space, while still being open and viewable from any other space in the store. This allows multiple activities (shopping, dining, gaming) to occur simultaneously without infringing on the other uses. It also creates a distinct atmosphere, unique to the store.

Station Retro has been open about six months now, on Jordan Avenue (Highway 53) in Huntsville, and they are growing in popularity each month!

