

# Redfish Plantation

By Tom Bie

**In Southeast Louisiana, a legendary redfish base awaits.**

IF YOU HAPPENED TO BE DRIVING NORTH ON LOUISIANA STATE HIGHWAY 23, just outside Homeplace, in October of 1998, you were probably a little pissed. Because taking up both lanes in front of you was the 125-year-old St. Patrick's Catholic church, moving very slowly for 14 agonizing miles on its way to Woodland Plantation, where it would spend the rest of its days as "Spirits Hall," a sort of angling halfway house offering visiting redfishermen a smooth transition between a day on the water and a night in bed.

This fall marks the ten-year anniversary of the re-opening of this southern Louisiana landmark, which was originally constructed in the 1830s and was purchased at public auction in 1997 by Foster Creppel and his parents, Jacques and Claire. After two years of heavy renovation, the Creppels opened Woodland as a nine-room bed and breakfast, much to the joy of redfish fanatics, whose other choices at that point consisted largely of a few remote lodges or some overpriced flophouses on Bourbon Street.

Situated on the west bank of the Mississippi, about 45 minutes south of downtown New Orleans, the 50-acre Woodland Plantation is easy to access from Louis Armstrong Airport, which in turn is easy to access from just about any city in the country. But the best aspect of Woodland isn't that it's close to New Orleans, but that it's surrounded by some three million acres of the best redfishing marsh on earth. With the boat ramp at Port Sulphur a mere ten minutes away.

Long-time local guide Captain Bryan Carter took us out our first morning, and promptly had me casting at hungry reds weaving in and out of holes in the widgeon grass. Carter is a not-very-old good old boy from Mississippi, meaning he is at that perfect threshold for a fishing guide: young enough to have all the enthusiasm and energy, but old enough to be considered a veteran when choosing among the endless Deep Delta options surrounding Plaquemines Parish.

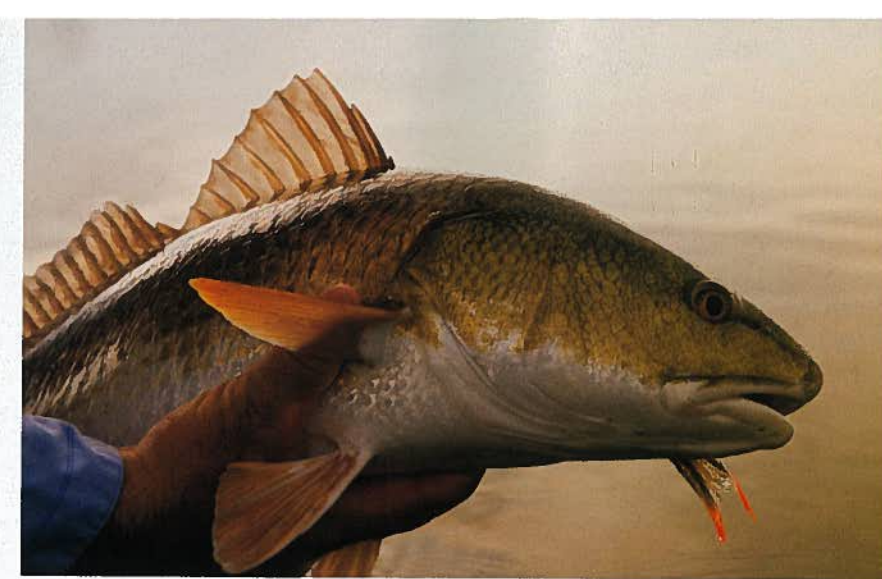
Later in the week, the mid-July weather created a couple glassy mornings for sight fishing with Captain Alec Griffin, the long-time former shop-watcher at Uptown Angler who recently turned his attention to guiding. Yet despite the pleasant beginnings to each day, thunderstorms rolling in quick from the Gulf forced us to keep a constant eye on approaching weather, especially the electric kind.

Once back at the Plantation, we usually took a quick stroll out back to feed Buddy, the resident gator, who has taken a liking to ham sandwiches and the occasional chicken.

Of course, a big part of what brings people to Louisiana is not just the fishing, or the music and cultural overload of the French Quarter, but the food. I'm no food critic, but Creppel and crew do Louisiana proud with their versions of seafood gumbo, fried bread pudding, and generous portions of extremely fresh oysters, washed down with a selection from the well-stocked bar.

Woodland was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1998—not surprising, considering the addition of the church-turned-bar, as well as the relocation and renovation of the Old Magnolia Store, which now serves to accommodate another half-dozen anglers not in need of the southern charm provided by the "Big House." (The interior of the general store, while comfortable, clean, and perfect for fishermen, feels more like deep Wyoming than deep South.)

Despite the fine food and fishing, Woodland is best known as the poster plantation for Southern Comfort, having graced the label on the bottle since 1934. Since our group was fishing every morning, we tried every evening to limit our consumption of Woodland's signature drink: Woodland Punch, which involves a liberal dose of Southern Comfort. But, alas, the drinking of Southern Comfort in the very region that inspired it is much like flyfishing for redfish in the area where it rules: Moderation can prove difficult. —Tom Bie



Buddy

