



WHITE SHADOWS

English-born portraitist Douglas Chandor (1897–1953) enjoyed a successful career as an artist, painting such luminaries as the Grand Duchess Marie of Russia, Winston Churchill, Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover, Eleanor Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin and, in 1952, the first official portrait of Queen Elizabeth II. But the course of Chandor's life was forever altered by love when he met Texas native Ina Kuteman at a New York social. They married, and Ina proved to be Chandor's muse, manager, helper and confidant. Returning to Ina's tiny hometown of Weatherford, Texas, to make their life together, Chandor embarked upon the greatest creation of his life: his garden.

According to Carroll C. Calkin, author of *Great Gardens of America* (1969), *White Shadows* was “one of the most beautiful one-man gardens in all of history.” *White Shadows* was a monumental labor of love, created over the span of time between 1936 to 1953. Chandor confessed that he painted in order to fund his real passion, his garden.

INSIDE THE GARDEN

On his three-and-a-half-acre canvas, Chandor built a hidden fish fountain with scaly brickwork, an arbor-covered pond whose millstone stepping stones afforded a view of the stone ship that displayed a bamboo sail and a waterfall. The waterfall cascaded from a 30-foot mountain of stone, within

which he erected a chimney to light his artificial volcano. There was a fern grotto, a tile-roofed Chinese moon gate guarded by ceramic Fu dogs, tall oriental pagodas and a glass-windowed diorama of a Chinese fishing village. Dova's Walk, named for Chandor's mother-in-law, connected the Chandor house with the adjacent Kuteman home. An homage to his wife appears there, written in Latin with bricks. It translates: "May the little garden flourish, dedicated to Ina in the year of the reign of Edward the Eighth."

The garden was defined by trellises massed with wisteria and by stately rows of arched apricot and pear trees. In spring their petals have been described as seeming to "drip like purple rain from everywhere." Two long allées led dramatically down to a large pool dominated by the double dragon fountain surrounded by a base of colored bottles and tiles that Chandor fired himself in the oven of the house.

PERPETUATING THE PASSION

Douglas Chandor died in January of 1953, and Ina Kuteman renamed the gardens Chandor Gardens to honor him. She kept the garden intact for another 25 years, un-

til her own passing in 1978. Then Chandor Gardens was shuttered and abandoned; the wisteria and other unfettered plantings engulfed the silent buildings. Time and circumstance threatened to deny the hopeful writing in the bricks. Children and stray animals were the sole visitors to what became a secret garden, a "garden without a door" that could easily have inspired any aspiring modern-day Frances Hodgson Burnett. Two of those children, Melody and Chuck Bradford, would later become the agents of the garden's resurrection.

The Bradfords bought the Chandor property in 1994. Many of the original ornaments, such as the seven-tiered pagodas, bronze cranes and delicate statues, were gone, having been sold or lost to vandals and deterioration. However, the basic structure, the stonework and the architecture of the gardens had survived, like some ancient ruin buried by the tendrils of time. The Bradfords' efforts to remove the massive wisteria vines and other debris and to restore the fountains and details could only have been empowered by a love of the place and a sense of reclaiming something unique, historical and invaluable.

Today the City of Weatherford, Texas, manages Chandor Gardens, and the restoration is nearing full

Water drips from Cox's Mountain, named after Ohio governor James Cox, who donated the money to import the stone to build it. His name is embedded in the top step. At right: Built on a base of glass bricks, the dragon fountain features embedded Coca-Cola bottles just above the water line, with 7-Up bottles 10 inches above them. The bottles creat a multi-colored glow when illuminated from within.









circle. Visitors enter a garden that provides a sense of timelessness in its evocative geometry. (Visit chandorgardens.com for more information.) The unexpected charm of its niches, ornaments and fountains is amplified by the novelty of encountering such a worldly garden in such a bucolic place. The bowling green is often littered with rose petals from recent weddings. The pears and apricots have been replaced with large crape myrtles, and there are more azaleas and not so many wisterias. The stone ship still sails, just where Chandor placed it, and the dragon fountain has been lovingly restored, a soft, cool geyser of hypnotic white noise in the lower pool.

The layout of the garden is an inspiration for any aspiring designer. One can easily spend an hour or more meandering among nooks and crannies, strolling to the overlooks, across the arched bridge and up the ivy-covered stone staircases. Chandor's garden has what I have often referred to as the Escher effect: one moment you are seeing some feature, like the fountain, from eye level, at another moment you see it from above, and then later it is the focal point at the end of a long allée.

SPIRIT RESTORED

Horticulturist and writer Steven Chamblee, an effusive, massive boulder of a man, has a prodigious

Above: These Fu dog statues hold court under 30-foot 'Muskogee' crape myrtles. At left: The keyhole slot in the Fu dog gate alludes to other ovals found skewered along the axis, anchored centrally by the dragon fountain. Roofing materials include beer bottles (between the "x"s), split tiles, clay sewer pipe and custom concrete capstone.



Texas-sized passion for the garden he has come to care for and restore over the past three years. He walks through the grounds with the sort of reverence that many reserve for a cathedral. He escorts visitors with the mischievous smile of a guide to some magical playground. He and Event Coordinator Karen Nantz, a wedding planner who became enamored with the garden and redirected her life's focus, now partner over the work in a sort of modern reprise of Douglas and Ina.

Chamblee once described the garden this way: "Skillfully crafted garden rooms, each unique in theme and function, are strung like pearls upon a thread of elegant pathways. Smooth hedges echo curves and alleys, accentuating the creative mind of their creator and paying homage to a whimsical elegance of days gone by. Beneath the canopy of live oaks, waters splash, flowers dance, birds flutter and sing. Stones mimic creatures, bricks weave patterns, broken shards tell stories. Beams of sunlight splay into prisms of color through glass and crystals while now-silent millstones lead the way across blue waters."

The Chandor garden combines folk art, English garden lines, Asian themes and great design into something unique and satisfying. It is imbued with history, romance and an artist's lack of concern for formal rules. All this makes it a particularly American place. The spirit of Douglas Chandor is still a tangible presence. While walking in his garden, it is not difficult to imagine encountering him there, striking some regal pose while smoking his pipe and examining the marbles he embedded around a Buddha statue ensconced in a niche. The oaks and other trees he planted are tall now, and in the late evening when the fall foliage is colorful, the light from the setting sun pierces the canopy of the arbor and emblazons the labyrinth of the garden with what must be described as white shadows.

As Chamblee rightly notes, "The charm of Chandor lives on." ■

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Below: In the boxwood garden, a drip fountain creates ever-changing patterns in the duckweed floating on the water. Chandor's cleverness is exemplified here, as the fountain is constructed from a tractor transmission case and front wheel assembly, disguised by smart brickwork. **At left:** The overlook. Urns of *Agave gemniflora* mimic the arching dragon fountain.

