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At home with Monet

Local artists find inspiration amid the French flora

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- Commentary
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- Education
- @ Home
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- Photo Galleries



- Archives
- Classifieds
- View Classifieds
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September 05, 2008

Celebrated Impressionist artist Claude Monet once said, "My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece."



Claude Monet's garden in Giverny, France is four acres of lush landscape, including a lily pond with a Japanese bridge, and served as the inspiration for many of his paintings. [\(click for larger version\)](#)

He was referring to his 4-acre estate in Giverny, approximately 40 miles from Paris in the Normandy region of France. Crafted by Monet himself, the garden served as the inspiration for many of his paintings, notably the Japanese bridge and water lilies series. He lived there from 1883 until he died in 1926.

"He was fascinated by the pond and the way the light reflected on the water and the water lilies," said Pat Fiorello, a Buckhead resident. "Basically, it was his outdoor studio. It is really an explosion of color that one designed with an artist eye in mind."

Hoping to be inspired by the setting, Fiorello, a professional artist and instructor, led an artist workshop at Monet's Garden from July 26 through Aug. 2. Ten students accompanied her to refine their technique and be immersed in French culture.

"It's a phenomenal place," Fiorello said. "For an artist, it's really ... the dream of a lifetime. To be able to go there and actually be on his property where he lived and where he painted was an amazing opportunity for artists."

The trip was organized in conjunction with ArtStudy Giverny and the Claude Monet Foundation, which granted special access to the artists. The students were welcome in the garden during hours closed to tourists.

"People really got a rare treat," Fiorello said. "One of the benefits of going through the program is that we get to go in there when no one else is there. It is just totally serene, just like when Monet was there."

In addition to experiencing the lushness of the garden – which was abloom with roses, nasturtium, water lilies, gladiola and geraniums – participants received instruction from Fiorello.

Fiorello, who has an M.B.A. from Harvard University, left



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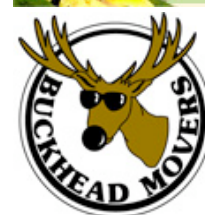
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a 20-year career as an executive for companies such as Coca-Cola and Nabisco to pursue her passion for art. An instructor for the past 10 years, she has taught all over Atlanta, including the Spruill Center for the Arts and The Art School in Sandy Springs. She is also a past president of the Georgia Watercolor Society and active with the Atlanta Artist Center.



Buckhead resident Pat Fiorello taught the artist workshop at Monet's Garden. ([click for larger version](#))

"She's a wonderful teacher," said Sandy Springs resident Susie Burch, who went on the trip. "She doesn't criticize one's painting. She realizes everyone's work is a journey. It's not about the product, but the process."

Students toured the town of Giverny, painting scenes of the countryside.

"The village really has got an Old World feel about it," Fiorello said. "It's almost frozen in time back to the 1800s."

Another day, they made a trip to Paris to visit Musée de l'Orangerie, where Monet's water lily paintings are displayed in an oval room for 360-degree viewing.

The artists' visit culminated with a showing of the work they produced on the trip.

All in all, Fiorello said, the trip was quite an experience for her students, one that helped them grow as artists.

"It was just wonderful," participant Cathy Ehrler said. "The flowers – the garden itself was much larger and grander than I ever expected it to be. It was a way for me to truly understand Monet's paintings of his gardens. I have seen them in museums and in exhibitions, but I never truly understood them until I saw the garden."

Another trip to Monet's Garden is planned for Aug. 25 to Sept. 2, 2009. Interested artists should contact Fiorello at www.patfiorello.com for more information.

A view into the garden

What: Showing of artwork inspired by Monet's Garden

When: Oct. 2-3

Where: Studio Z, 500 Means Street, Atlanta

Info: www.patfiorello.com.

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