

THE GREAT ESTATE

Gillespie home is an Old World slice of Heaven on Earth



Photo by Michael Attwood

By Joanne Liu
Photos by Scott Vallance

I F YOU STAND IN Charles and Rebecca Trois' living room, next to the Tiffany floor lamp and near the horn chairs from Theodore Roosevelt's lodge, you can catch a spectacular view of Enchanted Rock, the pink granite boulder rising 425 feet above the ground only a half mile away. Charles Trois will gladly expound on the magnificent history of one of the world's largest batholiths. But if you take a closer look at the surroundings, at the family and the objects in the house, you'll see something altogether different that will capture your attention, something just as magnificent and enchanting.

This private Gillespie County home on Trois Estate — with Mayan-inspired structures encompassing a luxury bed-and-breakfast, artisan marketplace, upscale Italian restaurant, Western dinner theater and events center all rolled into one — is the heart and soul of the estate. Though they keep their home closed to the public, the Troises have been known to open it up by private invitation or request. For those fortunate guests, the tour through its underground tunnels, across hallways overflowing with historical treasures and into gleaming catacombs and dens will surely astound the senses. It is an adventure unlike any other in the Heart of Texas — or in the state, the country or perhaps the world.

FOR CHARLES AND REBECCA, the adventure began when they first met in Johnson City. That meeting instantly created a bond that has resulted in their own pastoral utopia. In Rebecca's words, it was love at first sight. "He's everything to me, and I'm everything to him," she says. "We're each other's guiding light, a perfect yin and yang."

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Rebecca and Charles Trois met in Johnson City.

Every step they've taken since, including the search for the perfect piece of land to call home, was purposeful. For two and a half years, they searched for the right fit — in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Texas. "This has all been an evolution," Rebecca says. "I think land has a vibration, a life of its own, and Charles and I are tuned into each other, and we're tuned into the land."

The first time Rebecca saw the property near Fredericksburg, she knew it was the one. "It had been right after an ice storm, and the trees had icicles everywhere. It was just breathtaking," she recalls.

TODAY, GUESTS ENTER THE HOUSE THROUGH the backdoor and into a storage room filled with large, wooden barrels stacked against the wall. Curious guests might wonder

what the barrels hold, but all of them immediately sense an Old World aura from the moment they cross the threshold. What comes as a surprise, then, is that Charles Trois — its architect and builder — only finished constructing the house in 1998. Yet every door seems to creak and groan, as if the chorus of stories behind the antique objects in its vast interior is clamoring to get out and be told.

Among the doors that sing with age, one drowns out all others: the massive door leading from the storage room into the house. "I don't want to get the squeak out of it," Charles says as he steps into a cavernous room with a brick-vaulted ceiling.

What is in this room? Artifacts from all corners of the world and every rung of time, a lavish collection begun by Charles in his childhood: antique coin-ops and toys; head-

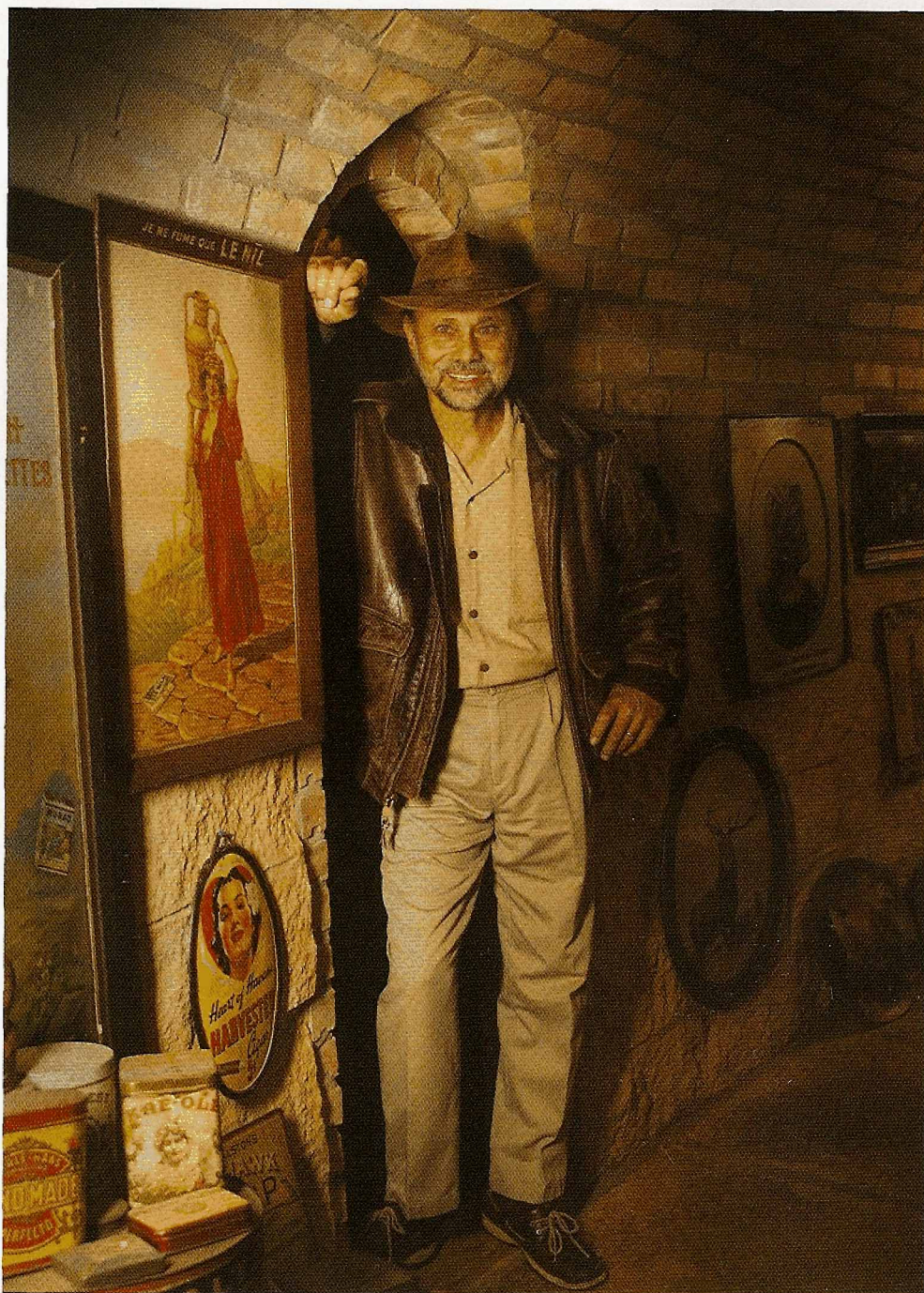
hunter gear; a 1971 Pablo Picasso painting; a club from the Medieval period; a vase presented to the queen of Portugal from the queen of England in the 1500s. With Charles's narration, guests could spend weeks rummaging through each object in this room. And this is but one room in the 20,000-square-foot house.

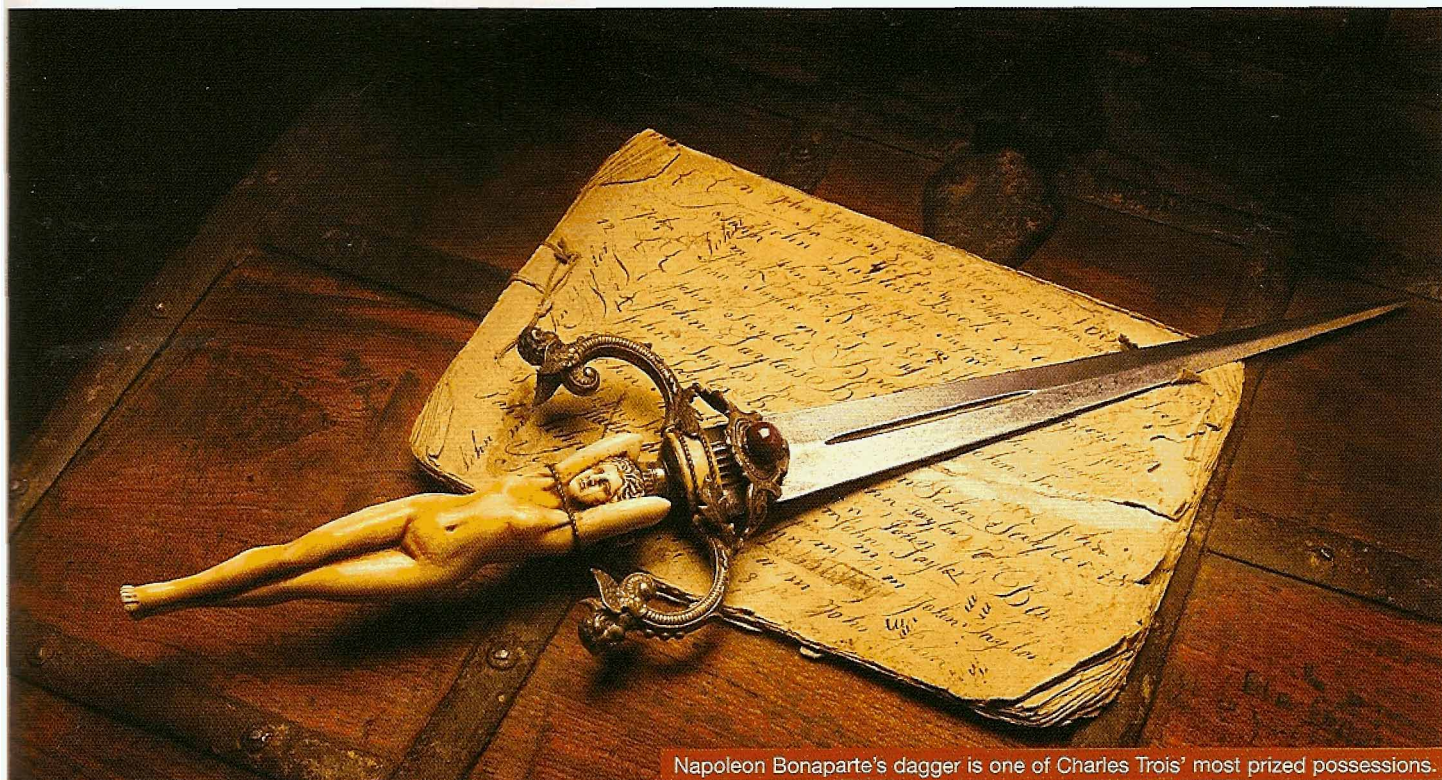
Charles's special interest lies in Western and American-Indian collectibles. He's built a separate 5,000-square-foot antique museum on the estate to display his toy cap gun collection. And in the dinner theater — an old Western tavern — he displays spurs in shadow box tables, including rare pairs dating back to Colonial times and the Spanish conquistadors.

He's amassed thousands of collectibles worth millions of dollars, including holster rigs, factory-engraved guns, Indian headdresses and early Bowie knife collections, harboring them in various museum rooms in his home.

In the main living room, surrounded by Theodore Roosevelt's horn chairs, a shadow box table displays a diorama model Charles fashioned, a miniature town with a train meandering around it not unlike the ones Charles once made for the motion picture industry.

The window by a child's horn chair frames a courtyard, an area Charles has reserved for hydroponics, while the opposite window overlooks a swimming pool. In the same room and elsewhere in the house, more treasures abound, including Charles' paintings. In his artwork, you'll find strange scenes brimming





Napoleon Bonaparte's dagger is one of Charles Trois' most prized possessions.

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over with balloons, eggshells, towers, boats, water and many, many unidentifiable creatures and objects that seemed to have spilled from his mind onto the canvas. A photographic surrealist, Charles paints purely from his imagination. Someone who studies his paintings will likely walk away intrigued, with a flurry of unanswered questions about the man behind the paintings. Although Charles hasn’t painted since 1998, he hopes to resume his art after completing his current project: the construction of Trois Estate.

THE UNIQUE DESIGN AND LAYOUT OF THE HOME is a reflection of Charles’ creative genius. “I don’t contrive anything. I want to let the development take me,” he says. The result is a harmonious collection of rooms and buildings surfaces, with each addition serving as creative leavening for the next.

Rebecca’s explanation is simple. “This is Charles’s living canvas. There are no blueprints to this. It’s all pure art for him,” she says. “He doesn’t sketch anything out, but he sees it in his mind. Before you know it, it starts coming together and he’s created this amazing property. He’s really a genius on multi-levels.”

The genius in him envisioned a home graced with brick-vaulted ceilings and glass-bottle windows. Just like the antique-museum room adjacent to the storage room, the same vaulted ceilings crown the rest of the house. Charles made a special trip to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico to learn the art of bricklaying. He incorporated the bricks into other spaces on the estate, as well as embedded glass bottles into various walls to serve as windows. If you navigate one

of the underground tunnels, you’ll notice natural light filtering through bottles in the wall and bathing one of the bathrooms in a soft glow. “I love making stuff out of nothing,” Charles says.

It takes a lot to understand the mind of Charles Trois — really understand him, that is. The best way to begin grasping who he is is to listen closely to his descriptions of each piece he handles. Under his even tone, you’ll detect a deep passion and trenchant intellect.

Perhaps his most prized possession is Napoleon Bonaparte’s dagger, kept under lock and key in his favorite place, the antique gun room (which is accessible only through an underground tunnel). The dagger’s grip is an ivory sculpture of a naked woman and its blade is crowned by a ruby just above the guard. “Pick something like that up,” he says with fierce enthusiasm. “There are times when I’ll pick something up and, boy, it just has the wildest feeling to it, like this thing went through this amazing history!”

Though not a hunter, he’s deeply interested in guns. “I thought antique firearms had a wonderful art form, just a beauty in it,” he says.

His knowledge is comprehensive. He’ll show you American-Indian blankets, peace medals given to Native Americans by George Washington, numerous gun rigs and beaded rigs with swastikas adorning the items. The swastikas, he’ll explain, are not “swastikas” but rolling logs, a universal symbol used by American Indians to signify peace, but whose meaning was later eclipsed by its use in Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Party.

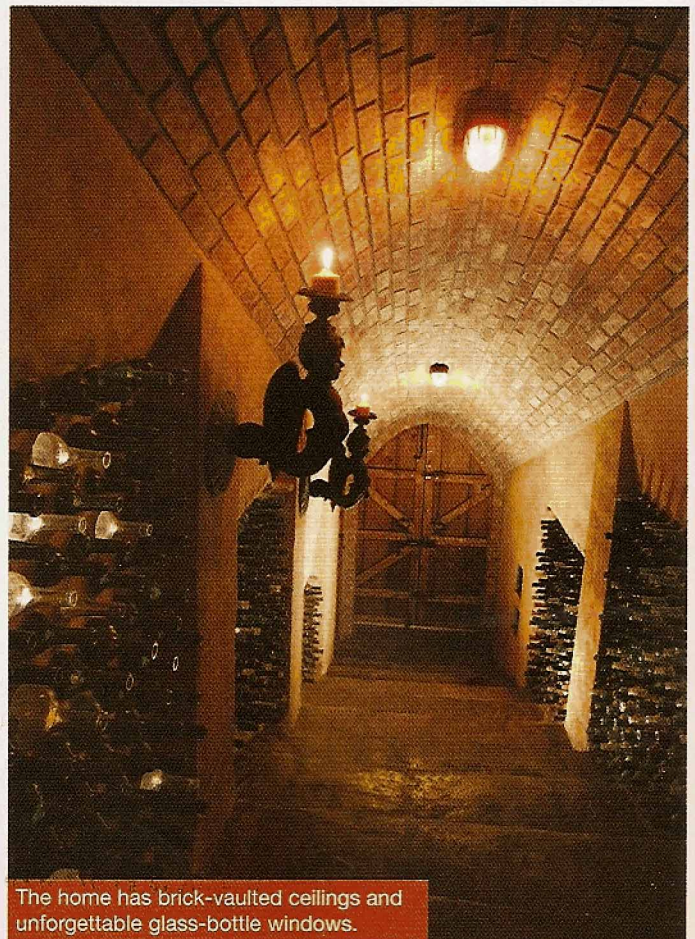
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The antique gun room is accessible only through an underground tunnel.



Teddy Roosevelt's horn chairs in the main living room.



The home has brick-vaulted ceilings and unforgettable glass-bottle windows.



Trois got this wax piece after much trouble from a Fredericksburg estate.

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Sometimes, if you catch Charles at the right moment, he'll reveal his more contemplative side. "We're only caretakers of all this stuff. We have it for a certain amount of time, and then it's going to go into other hands. You come in with nothing, and you go out with nothing."

Case in point: In his wine cellar (a work of art in itself), Charles showcases a delicately carved wax scene of Comanche Indians scalping a victim. "I got it from a fellow in Fredericksburg that had a beautiful estate. We used to trade and buy and sell, but he would never sell it to me. The only way I got it was to buy his estate and everything in it," he says with a smile. "I auctioned off everything else in his estate just to get this wax piece."

CHARLES DOESN'T TALK MUCH ABOUT HIMSELF. But sometimes, when he talks about his passion for Western collectibles, listeners might get a glimpse. "In the old days," he says, "you just went for as big as you could think. You just went for it." Charles thought big when he envisioned the design of his home and went for it when he created this Old World village among the rough and craggy landscape.

"And of course, it was very hard on the individual back then. The way the Old West was, it was about how strong you were," he says.

No doubt Charles is a strong man. He doesn't consider whether he can accomplish a goal; he simply goes out and does it. With this attitude, he's accomplished more in his lifetime than most. He's a collector, historian, architect, builder, bricklayer, furniture maker, painter, musician, husband and father. The list goes on and on.

If Charles is the genius of the estate, then Rebecca is its nurturing soul. Her generous spirit allows people to relax and be themselves. To hear her talk about Trois Estate is to listen to her describe the things she keeps closest to her heart. "We're creating our own heaven on earth," she says. "It's very rich, this life that we have."

You don't often meet someone like Rebecca. Anyone who spends time with her feels the peace she exudes — that is the gift she offers her family, friends and guests. She celebrates life by living in the moment, aware and appreciative of her true treasures — her husband, her three sons (Cameron, 15, Bryce, 9, and Ryder, 7) and her employees, whom she and Charles welcome as part of their family.

Even during the rare moments Rebecca feels stress, she

puts her anxiety into God's hands. "I say the Lord's Prayer over and over again," she says. "I'll concentrate on every word and it seems to melt my anxiety. All of a sudden I'll experience a sense of peace coming over me."

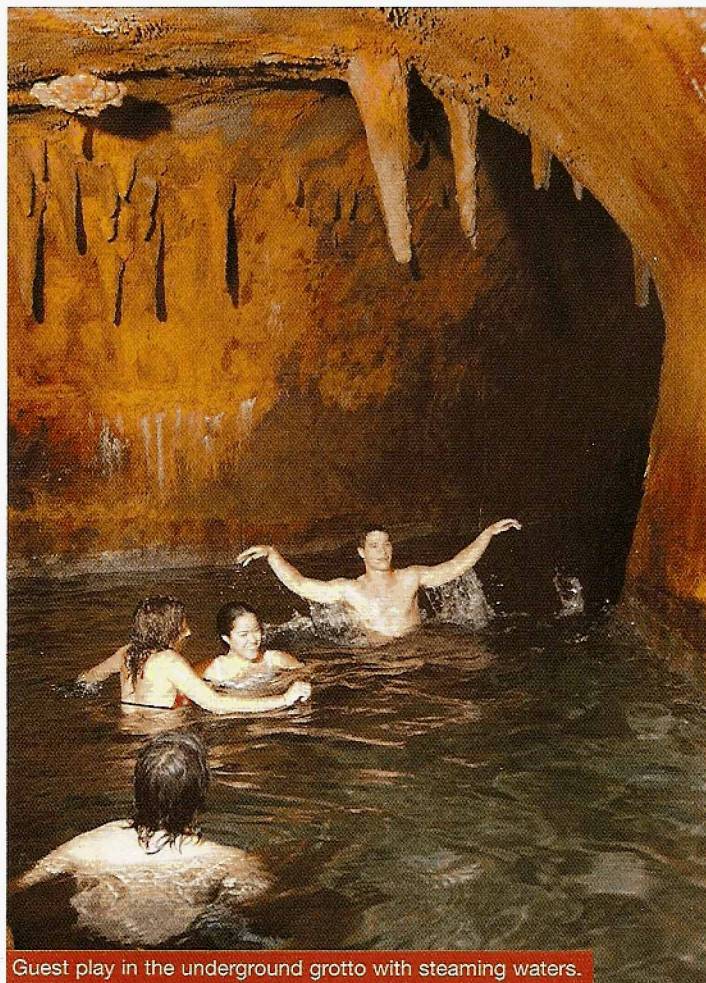
REBECCA'S INNER PEACE IS DEEPLY ROOTED in her life experiences. When she was 15, she lost her three brothers, Tommy, Gregory and Curtis, in a span of nine months. "I went through a soul searching," she says. "When you go through something like that it takes you to such deep places that you have to find answers or else you're gonna die. You have to find peace or else it will destroy you."

Their tragic deaths shaped Rebecca into who she is today. She is currently at work on an inspirational book while continuing to be the best mother she can possibly be. Her three sons always occupy her thoughts and her heart. "Every child has a way that they shine, that they soar," she says. "Whatever it is, when you recognize that special spark and let that be the focus of their lives, it drives them and gives them confidence. They become a star in their own special way."

Rebecca runs the estate with co-manager Isaac Grimmer, and takes care of the people. Until recently, she also was the head chef at the Italian restaurant, organizing the recipes and the events. "I was working so hard, and Charles kept asking me to put an ad in the paper. But I said, 'You know, God's gonna send me the right guy when the time's right.'"

That's exactly what happened. Rebecca's new chef, Charles Clark, walked right through the door. Clark had

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Guest play in the underground grotto with steaming waters.



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“Cooking is my way of expressing myself, and I express love for my family through it.”

heard about Trois Estate from the pastry chef. “When I found this guy, he was just right,” Rebecca says. The success of the business is evident, despite little advertising. In October alone, the estate hosted 12 weddings.

REBECCA, WHO’S BEEN COOKING SINCE SHE was 8 years old, sees it as her art. “Cooking is my way of expressing myself, and I express love for my family through it,” she says. “My heart has gone into developing recipes for my family.” The same goes for her restaurant food and the way she manages the estate. “I put my heart into it, and everyone who comes has that same feeling.”

As for the future of Trois Estate, Charles has his ideas. “I envision street vendors here, but really, in an Old World way, not like Disney World.” However it turns out, the Troises know it will follow the right course. “You let it evolve and let it take its own path. You just build something, and then somebody comes and it just sort of happens like that. It needs to go through those transitions, and it needs to take on a life of its own,” Charles says.

With this attitude, the Troises’ home has become a true reflection of themselves. There’s a completeness about the creation of the estate that can’t fully be explained. The couple are passionate in their own ways, and there’s something profoundly carefree in the way they live their lives. They love, they share and they embrace the camaraderie. Guests of the estate marvel at the brick-vaulted ceilings, mosaic rooftop floors, 3-foot-thick walls and underground grotto with steaming waters. But they also revel in the peace that reigns over the property.

Whatever the task or challenge, the Troises will continue immersing their lives in their own little paradise. From a humble motor home on a 57-acre lot, their property has evolved into an ever-changing canvas of living history, an architectural aria full of surprises. Trois Estate is a reality — a reality that is nearly as perfect as their biggest dreams and their highest hopes. ☞

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