

# Back to the gardens

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BY STEVE GIBBS

Free Press Staff

UPPER KEYS — Strap on walking shoes for the 2011 Annual Garden Walk, the showcase event of the Upper Keys Garden Club's between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Friday, Feb. 25.

This year's tour takes garden enthusiasts through five pampered properties — from a palm-dotted, white-sand beach resort that makes time stand still to a commercial nursery-owner's bayside property where hundreds of native plants were transplanted from the Lower Keys to make way for the Sugarloaf School.

Other properties include a private estate with a thatched beach house and a fruit orchard, a hardwood hammock showcased from a wooden catwalk and a winter home with multiple gardens surrounding a pool and bath house.

Tours of the private gardens are self-guided, although the owners or caretakers will be on hand at most locations to share information. Visitors are welcome to stay at each location as long as they wish.

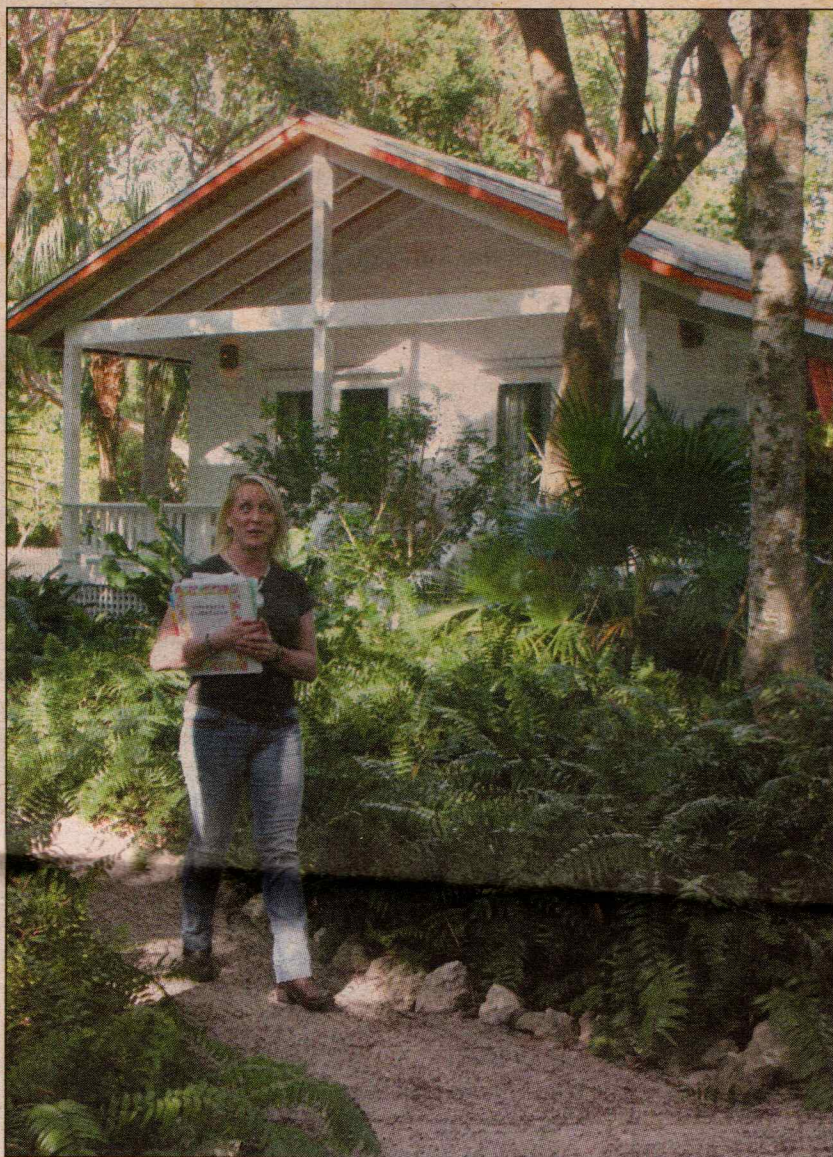
Not all garden displays are located close together, so some driving is required.

Tickets with a map of garden locations are available for a \$20 donation to the Upper Keys Garden Club. Donations will be collected and maps distributed at the Francis Tracy Garden Center, mile marker 94, bayside, which will also include live music by Dave Feder, a garden tea party, arts and crafts vendors, a plant ramble and an art show by the Purple Isles Art Guild.

## Under the boardwalk

The garden of Neil Boyce's "Pandora in the Keys" home appears vertical as railed, dark wooden ramps and stairs ascend from his second-story porch through the trees and onto his roof. The catwalk overlooks the jungle below that seems a reflection of Boyce himself:

See **GARDENS**, page 26



Above, Jerri Grossman, co-chair of the Garden Walk, walks along the garden path at The Moorings. Garden walkers will be delighted by garden features at all five of the selected venues.

STEVE GIBBS/Free Press





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# keys cruisin'

YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE TO ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT, THINGS TO DO AND LIFE IN THE UPPER KEYS

**Press**

FEB. 23 - MARCH 1, 2011



## Gardens

Continued from page 26

near the front gate. The trench, an original mosquito pond, is filled with water and stocked with larvae-eating fish.

### Transformative art

On Plantation Key is Natalie and Barry Dorf's Turtle Bay, a canalfront home named, in part, for the turtles on the front gate.

The two-lot property had been home to legendary local educator Roger Allen for many years.

"We bought a small, white CBS house on two building lots with dead grass and dying fruit trees," Natalie Dorf told the Free Press. "Barry is a builder. I'm an artist."

Under her artistic direction, the couple built an additional floor, added a porch and transformed the house before they built the largest private in-ground swimming pool

allowed under local regulations.

As the pool was going in and a bath house was being built, Natalie Dorf hired Bill Rusch, a Homestead landscaper, because he knew just what to do with the property and gave her all the right answers.

"As soon as he described planting palm trees between the pool and the bath house to create a vertical look, I knew he was the right one for the job," she said. "It gives the entire area an elegant look."

A bright garden at the feet of the palms breaks up the scene. Themed gardens around the home call both man and nature to stop and take in the richness.

### Rare trees

Overlooking Community Harbor in Tavernier is Gerry and Wendy Droney's Private Native Collection, a bayside 1.5-acre property where the nursery owners keep indigenous plants and trees, both

common and rare.

The inviting, tree-speckled meadow hides behind a large chain-link gate at the edge of the highway. Stacks of huge limestone blocks lead the visitor onto the property.

There, one can find wild date, thatch palms, sea grape, mahogany, gumbo limbo, black ironwood and a huge royal poinciana tree that shades the grounds.

A row of potted plants line the front, awaiting display at Droney's nursery a few miles down the highway. The area opens up to a clubhouse on the right and a sturdy CBS home to the left, closest to the front. Like most bayside properties, it slopes front to back, from the road to the water.

"Fifteen years ago I bought this for nothing," Gerry Droney said. "It was all overgrown with [Australian] pine and Florida holly, but we cleared it and use this acre-and-a-half as a storage area, more or less."

The property features several trees transplanted from the area cleared years ago for Sugarloaf School.

A special feature of the property is a rare buccaneer palm, a native Keys palm that Droney says now exists only under cultivation. A 100-year-old joewood tree no bigger than a chest-high bush also calls the property home.

For more information, go to [www.upperkeysgardenclub.com](http://www.upperkeysgardenclub.com).

[sgibbs@keysnews.com](mailto:sgibbs@keysnews.com)

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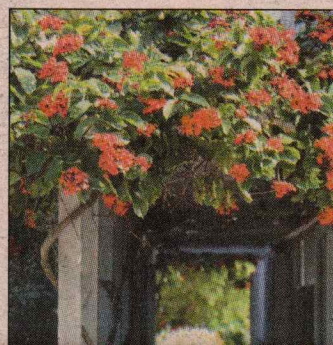
Free Community Class  
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## Morada Bay Beach Cafe'

### Breakfast on the Bay at the Beach Café

Open from 7am – 11am  
Serving Island Style Benedicts



a canalfront home named, in part, for the turtles on the front gate.

The two-lot property had been home to legendary local educator Roger Allen for many years.

"We bought a small, white CBS house on two building lots with dead grass and dying fruit trees," Natalie Dorf told the Free Press. "Barry is a builder. I'm an artist."

Under her artistic direction, the couple built an additional floor, added a porch and transformed the house before they built the largest private in-ground swimming pool

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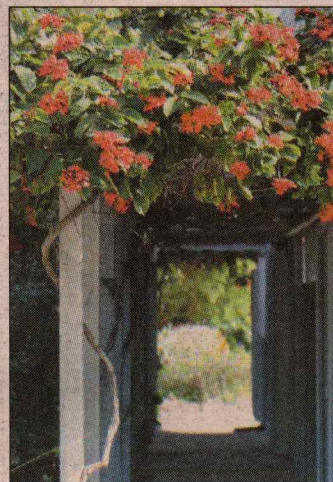
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STEVE GIBBS/Free Press

Above, Gerry Droney shows off a stand of bamboo at the edge of his nursery. Top right, flowering vines create a shady walkway beneath the arbor at the Sands property. Bottom right, whimsical greetings are offered at the Pandora property by this garden statue donning a sun hat.



Free Community Class  
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## Morada Bay Beach Cafe'

### Breakfast on the Bay at the Beach Café

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including fresh lobster & crab!  
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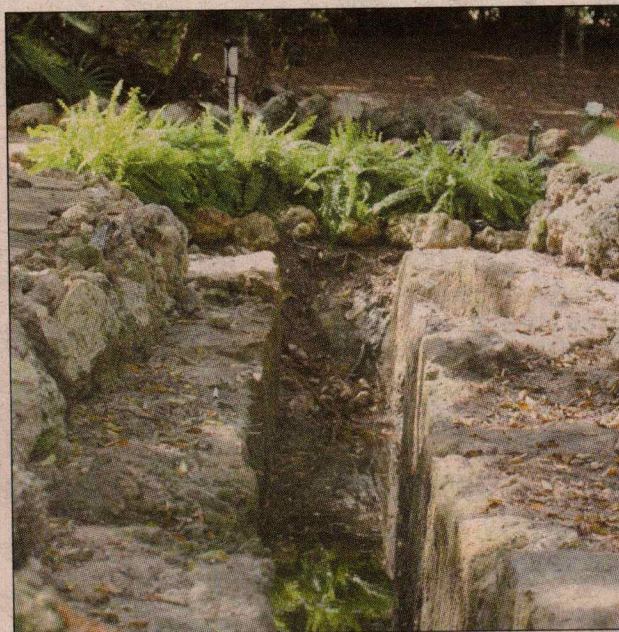
## Morada Bay Beach Café

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## COVER STORY



STEVE GIBBS/Free Press

Left, a visitor climbs a stairway in the hardwood hammock at The Moorings. Center, a mosquito trench, an early form of mosquito control, is a feature of the Sands property. Right, bromeliads and cacti can be found on the Droney native nursery.

## Gardens

Continued from page 19

orderly but a little wild, mostly predictable but with the ability

to surprise you and as solid as a lignumvitae tree.

Tucked behind a wooden fence on Orange Lane near mile marker 88, a lush canopy of wild tamarind, gumbo

limbo and mahogany shade a half-acre garden of bromeliads, ferns and orchids.

A fountain topped with a conch shell invites visitors to sit on a nearby bench. A small

bird flits through the middle branches, 15 feet over a soft pathway that leads around to a work area, all lush and inviting. It offers a fine habitat for small critters willing to work in harmony with one another.

shores. They found space for one another in a montage of interactive beauty, rich in the manna of life.

Baudoin's village of 18 restored and replicated Keys-style homes at the water's edge is a place that soothes.

**THE UPPER KEYS CONCERT SERIES**

**OPERA**

**Presents:**

**THE DUILLING DIVAS**

## Back in time

Nestled by the ocean near mile marker 81.5 is a collection of cottages on 18 acres called The Moorings Village & Spa, one of Hubert Baudoin's mesmerizing resort properties.

Stroll along the beach at The Moorings and go back 80 years in time when only a few

## Fruitful grounds

Off the Old Highway near the Green Turtle Restaurant is a private estate known as "The Sands."

A most congenial caretaker, Jeanne Corbin, will greet walkers and answer questions





STEVE GIBBS/Free Press

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**THE UPPER KEYS CONCERT SERIES**

**OPERA**

**Presents:**

**THE DUELLING DIVAS**

**Saturday, February 26th, 2011**

*For those who doubt that opera is the highest of the performing arts, Duelling Divas is an eye (and ear) opener. Sopranos Birget Fioravanti and Wendy Reynolds, along with pianist Heather Colman are well known through their association with the Florida Grand Opera, Palm Beach Opera and the Florida Philharmonic. Now they have written and brought to life a theatrical extravaganza directed by Trent Blanton combining excellent singing of familiar operatic pieces with parody, satire and some slapstick. With their big egos, gorgeous voices and ridiculous characters they have created a show every audience will enjoy.*

**PERFORMANCE WILL BE SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26TH AT 8:00 P.M. ISLAND COMMUNITY CHURCH, MM 83.3**

*Admission is by season ticket or \$25 at the door.*

Tickets for this performance may be purchased at Artamorada in the Rain Barrel, Islamorada or Key Largo Art Gallery 103200 Overseas Hwy  
For more information phone Joyce Peckman at 305-451-0665  
or Mary Lee Singer at 305-240-0061

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## Back in time

Nestled by the ocean near mile marker 81.5 is a collection of cottages on 18 acres called The Moorings Village & Spa, one of Hubert Baudoin's mesmerizing resort properties.

Stroll along the beach at The Moorings and go back 80 years in time when only a few early settlers watched the sun rise over the Gulf Stream. Walk through overflowing flowered paths to a cottage near the beach and visualize sitting on the porch overlooking the ocean with a cup of hot coffee, surrounded by native buttonwood and gumbo limbo trees shading neatly cultivated gardens full of color.

Before these coral-based islands were inhabited, winds and birds and ocean currents scattered the seeds of a great variety of flowering plants and life-giving fruit trees onto these

## Fruitful grounds

Off the Old Highway near the Green Turtle Restaurant is a private estate known as "The Sands."

A most congenial caretaker, Jeanne Corbin, will greet walkers and answer questions about this estate, which features a two-story thatched roof beach house overlooking a sand beach and a pier that stretches out over clear waters.

Corbin and husband Tim, as custodians of the property, have put their talents to good use over the six years since sailing in from South Carolina.

A fruit orchard is in full display with oranges and limes, and a long trench sculpted out of hard coral greets visitors





LONELL RICE/Contributed

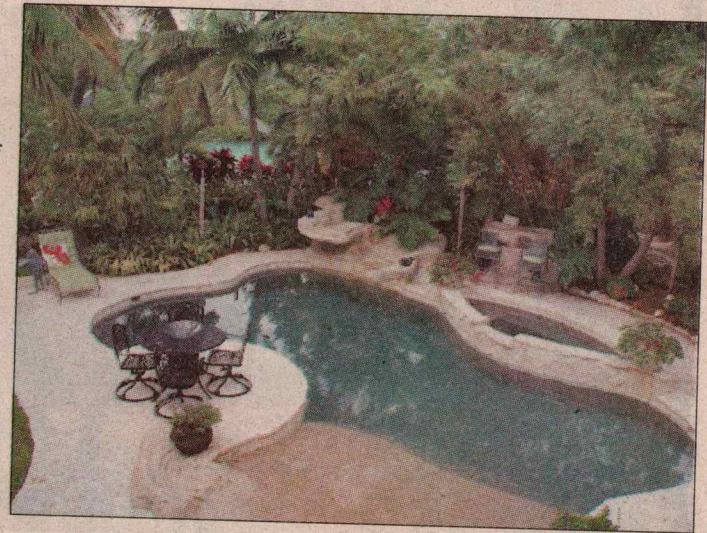
Jennifer Hagood's custom raised garden boxes are ideal for the home gardener seeking an easier way to grow vegetables. Her Upper Matecumbe Key business is a stop on this year's garden tour.

## Garden

Continued from page 33

"We took rubber molds of sliced coral and made durable concrete stones. We brought in 50-50 soil with the proper pH. If we don't use the right soil the roots will refuse to grow into the alkaline rock and curl around," said D'Ascanio.

When touring "Bali Hai" leave your camera in your car. D'Ascanio said that the Landaus have been "extremely open" in their new community but would appreciate that their privacy be preserved.



LONELL RICE/Contributed

Ed and Donna Cortez's Lower Matecumbe Key garden features 'a lagoon look' with a waterfall splashing into the swimming pool.

## The Garden Box

The Garden Box, a gardening business at mile marker 81.6 off the Old Highway in Islamorada, is a somewhat unusual addition to the garden tour. It is no movie set but,

rather, sets the table for anyone to grow fresh vegetables at their own little Bali Hai.

Jennifer Hagood's custom raised boxes are perfect for the home gardener who is weary of bending over rows of vegetables to plant, weed and harvest.

Her own personal boxes, on

display as models for what her customers can grow, are filled with peppers, broccoli, onions, eggplant, lettuce, carrots, radishes, a variety of herbs and at least 16 types of heirloom tomatoes that taste nothing like the red orbs found in large

See **GARDEN**, page 36

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## COVER STORY



LONELL RICE/Contributed

John and Lorraine Liataud's 'Southern Comfort' has a view of Alligator Light and Indian Key across the expanse of shimmering ocean.

## Garden

Continued from page 35

supermarkets.

She and her family will custom build and paint raised boxes and set them up on your property from Key Largo to Lower Matecumbe Key. The boxes vary in cost but the average is about \$450 painted or \$350 unpainted. She says she is happy to provide gardening advice for those who wish to grow their own produce.

"I also have plants available for sale," Hagood said.

Hagood's garden is located directly behind Gallery Morada in the shade of several native trees where just enough sunlight penetrates to energize her plants.

They are kicked out of the nest."

The Chateau Cortez nest is sure to delight guests.

## Southern Comfort

At the ocean's edge, at the end of the driveway, is "Southern Comfort," a home with islands of palm trees surrounded by putting-green-size grass amid sparkling white sand. In August turtles lay their eggs on the beach in front of the home.

John and Lorraine Liataud have a view of Alligator Light and Indian Key across the expanse of shimmering ocean that almost whispers the word "relax." The busy highway seems as distant as the moon.

John says he and his wife are not gardeners but hired the owners of Beach House Garden Center in Key Largo, Joel and Lili Cossio, to landscape their property.

"I told them, 'Here's your canvas. You create what you will.' They did and we are very pleased," he said. "They created rock gardens and a lovely waterfall at the swimming pool.

"They even planted a blueberry tree. Up in Illinois where we live in the summer we have blueberry bushes. This must be a hybrid," he surmised.

The Upper Keys Garden Walk includes a complementa-

## Chateau Cortez

A winding driveway lined with palm trees greets guests at mile marker 77.3, bayside, on Lower Matecumbe Key, the home of Ed and Donna Cortez.

Orchids of every color are attached to the canopy of palms and gumbo limbo as you enter the elongated property. One huge lavender orchid sports 80 to 100 blossoms. A bronze mermaid stands in front of the home, but the backyard between the house and the water relax the



## MARATHON GARDEN CLUB

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## House & Garden Tour and Flower Show

*...There's no place like home...in the Keys!*

A combination driving & walking tour featuring a spectacular collection of homes & gardens...

*...Sting Ray Sound...*

*...Paradise South...Cat. 5 House!*



**Saturday March 3, 2012**

**10am-4pm**

**\$25.00 per person**

(includes light refreshments)



John and Lorraine Liataud's 'Southern Comfort' has a view of Alligator Light and Indian Key across the expanse of shimmering ocean.

LONELL RICE/Contributed



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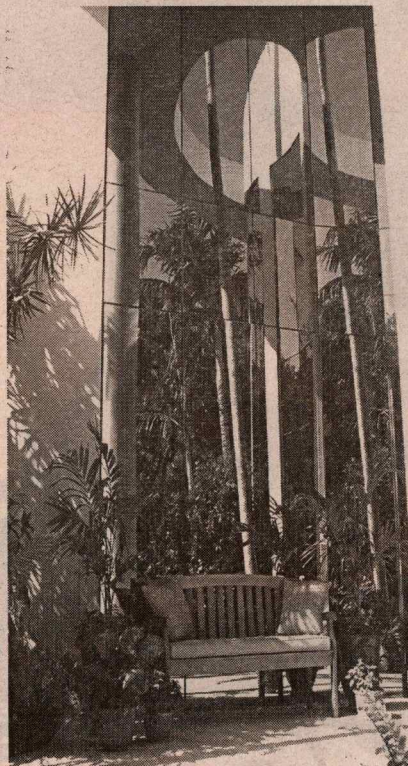
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**10am-4pm**

**\$25.00 per person**

**(includes light refreshments)**

Tickets can be purchased in advance at the Garden Club, Chamber of Commerce, Key Bana, Royal Furniture, Tropical Island Outlet or Wicker Web!

Raffle tickets available at the Garden Club for watercolor prints by local artists Judith Conner, M. Ann Lynch, Dale Malone & Julie Joyce!

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Wine & Cheese Preview Party of Flower Show on Friday, March 2 from 5pm-6:30pm

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advice for those who wish to grow their own produce.

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Behind the pool is a huge 35-foot stand of bamboo and a giant ficus tree that shades the area. The sound of the waterfall almost drowns out the sound of the ospreys that nest high up behind the bamboo.

"Four years ago a mated pair of osprey hatched three chicks," Donna said. "They have a new brood every year. The second day after the fledglings fly, the parents do not allow them back in the nest.

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The Upper Keys Garden Walk includes a complimentary garden tea party, a plant sale and live music at the Francis Tracy Garden Center. Proceeds will be used to support the club's historic center as well as civic beautification projects, scholarships and educational activities.

For further information, contact chairwoman Dee Dee Barreto at (305) 332-0535 (dbarreto@bellsouth.net) or co-chair Jerri Grossman at 453-4590 (jbirdsfly@aol.com).

Tickets may be purchased at the garden center on the day of the walk.

[sgibbs@keysnews.com](mailto:sgibbs@keysnews.com)