

[Return to story](#)

## **bassett house >> 'Kit' house is a hidden treasure at Montpelier bassett house >>**

**April 10, 2008 2:41 am**

By LAURA L. HUTCHISON

By LAURA L. HUTCHISON



LEFT: Winding stone paths lead visitors to the garden, which is a Western adaptation of ones found in Japan.



Visitors are treated to an extraordinary view of an Oriental garden from the back porch of Bassett House at Montpelier.



Daffodils bloom at Montpelier's Bassett House--built from a kit in the 1930s.



Bassett House, built in the 1930s, is a small cottage tucked away in a secluded corner of James Madison's Montpelier estate.



Bamboo is an authentic accent found in the Oriental garden at Bassett House in Orange.

Thousands have seen President James Madison's Orange County home Montpelier, but for the first time, garden tour visitors will be able to see a lesser-known but equally intriguing home on the property.

Bassett House, named for Carroll K. Bassett, Marion duPont Scott's horse trainer and an accomplished steeple-chase jockey, will be open to the public for the first time April 19. The house is part of this year's Orange County "Homes and Gardens Across the Ages in Montpelier Hunt Country" tour.

The tour is sponsored by the Dolley Madison Garden Club and presented by The Garden Club of Virginia.

The charming seven-room white clapboard house was built in the 1930s. It was a "kit" house, manufactured by the E.F. Hodgson Co. of Dover, Mass.

It was mail-ordered, delivered to Orange, and assembled onsite.

Bassett House is the residence of the president of the Montpelier Foundation, Michael C. Quinn, and his wife, Carolyn.

Carolyn Quinn has a book, "Portable and Prefabricated Houses of the Thirties," that includes Hodgson catalog descriptions, and many of the photos look much like the interior of the home, which the Quinns have occupied since 1999.

"You could pick all different details," she said. "This entryway cost this much; if you wanted that mantel it was this much."

The house's rooms are spacious, with a vaulted ceiling in the living room, and light flooding in from French doors and a huge bay window in the "bird room," so named because it used to house an enormous bird cage.

"The walls are very thin," she said. "You can see how everything was connected. You just bolted everything together and you were done. It was a nice way of inexpensively putting a house up, and you didn't have to worry about getting a lot of laborers to do it."

The kitchen was remodeled and modernized by a previous occupant, but most of the rooms remain in their original condition, though some additions were designed and made by the Charlottesville architects Johnson

Craven Gibson.

Most of the rooms feature built-in shelves and drawers.

Quinn calls the furnishings "eclectic," with pieces from her parents' travels, and both military grandfathers' time in the Philippines and China.

The Quinns have lovingly restored Bassett House, doing much of the work themselves. Their bedroom is the one in which jockey Bassett died, after losing a limb to diabetes.

"[Bassett] also was a gardener and sculptor," Quinn said, noting that two dog sculptures, guarding the porch leading to the garden, were done by Bassett.

"The jewel in the crown is the Oriental garden at the bottom of the hill."

Noted landscape architect Charles F. Gillette consulted on the Oriental garden during visits to Montpelier to work on the Annie duPont Formal Garden, also on Montpelier property and part of this year's tour.

Quinn will have correspondence between Gillette and Montpelier's caretakers on display, as well as the original plans.

The Quinns, with help from fellow members in the Dolley Madison Garden Club, have worked tirelessly to restore the Oriental garden, as well. No funds donated to Montpelier are used at Bassett House or its gardens; special donations fund the work there.

The garden contains a large variety of Asian plants, many put in more than years ago.

A rock path leads visitors to a new machia--or "waiting bench"--in the garden. "It's an opportunity for people to come in, listen to the birds, and commune with nature, before going into the garden," Quinn said.

The stone path forces visitors to look down, controlling their pace and slowly revealing the garden's secrets. Those include stones mimicking a mountain; Hote, the Korean god of wisdom; a pool surrounded by white rock to look like beach; and a bridge that zigzags across the water, to confuse the demons who may be tailing you.

Quinn is careful to describe it as an Oriental garden, not a Japanese garden.

"Some people who've come in to help have wanted to turn it into a pure Japanese garden, but that's not what Mr. Bassett had," she said. "This reflects a man who obviously enjoyed gardening, traveled and saw something like this somewhere, and thought 'Wouldn't it be fun to have this here?' It's very much about being alone, being one with nature, and just enjoying its beauty."

Laura L. Hutchison: 540/374-5485

Email: [lhutchison@freelancestar.com](mailto:lhutchison@freelancestar.com)

---

Copyright 2008 The Free Lance-Star Publishing Company.