

## Villa Finale

Francis Crider, original architect (1876)

6,894 square feet (with Basement and Tower Room)

13 rooms (not counting Basement and Bar)

8 fireplaces

4 bathrooms

## The Grounds

Original lot size: 3 lots

Briefly extended to four lots from 1908-1917

Original structures pre-dating Walter Mathis: Main house,

Carriage House, front perimeter wall

Lot size today: just under two acres

## WELCOME TO THE GARDENS AT VILLA FINALE!

San Antonio civic leader Walter Nold Mathis purchased this property in 1967 after discovering his home in the nearby neighborhood of Monte Vista would be razed for the Highway 281 project. Local preservation architect, O'Neil Ford sold him on the historic charm and architectural beauty of this house. After restoring the house - which had been used as a boarding home since the 1930s - Mathis filled the dwelling with his collection of fine and decorative art.

Concluding the work on this house, Mathis set out to purchase and at least partially restore fourteen more historic properties in King William, as well as design the gardens at Villa Finale. Mathis' work in the gardens are not a restoration of what was here previously but rather, an extension of the experience people had inside the home. His work in the gardens is its own celebrated work of art which has been highly overshadowed by his preservation of the house. Each area of the gardens was designed to be like separate "gallery" space with differing planting styles. In fact, during the nearly forty years Mathis owned the property, the gardens were on tour more than the house itself, and were featured in a variety of publications and advertisements.

As you tour the gardens, keep in mind that their design says a lot about who Walter Mathis was: a person who enjoyed surrounding himself with beauty, who treasured privacy, and who was highly influenced by life experiences. The plantings he chose must be seen for their aesthetic value rather than their horticultural significance. This self-guide will reveal a timeline of Mathis' years living on the property and give visitors an insight into his idea of beauty.

- ⑥ **Front Garden (1980-Present):** The lions "guarding" the front of the house were added by 1980, and in 1984 were moved on top of the pedestals that are still there today. Other than natural growth of plantings, little changed in this area of the garden during this period. As Mathis aged, his private time with family on the site became dearer, and time spent on public duties grew limited. However, interest in Villa Finale was reawakened in 2002 when it was announced Mathis would gift the site and collections to the National Trust, which opened the museum in 2010. Stand on this spot marked with the ● to get the exact view of Mathis in the photograph below.



Walter Mathis, southeast corner of the Front Garden, c. 1972

### NATIVE TEXAS TREES AT VILLA FINALE

**A** Live Oak

**D** Texas Pecan

**B** Red Oak

**E** Anaqua

**C** Mountain Laurel

**F** Possumhaw

**Have a question during your stroll of our gardens? Call (210) 215-7039 and one of our staff will be happy to help you in real time!**

Visit our website [www.VillaFinale.org](http://www.VillaFinale.org) for online programming or to make a donation. You can also follow us on our social media platforms!



## SELF GUIDE

## VILLA FINALE: MUSEUM & GARDENS

*Experience the beauty ...  
OF OUR GARDENS*



### VISITATION RULES:

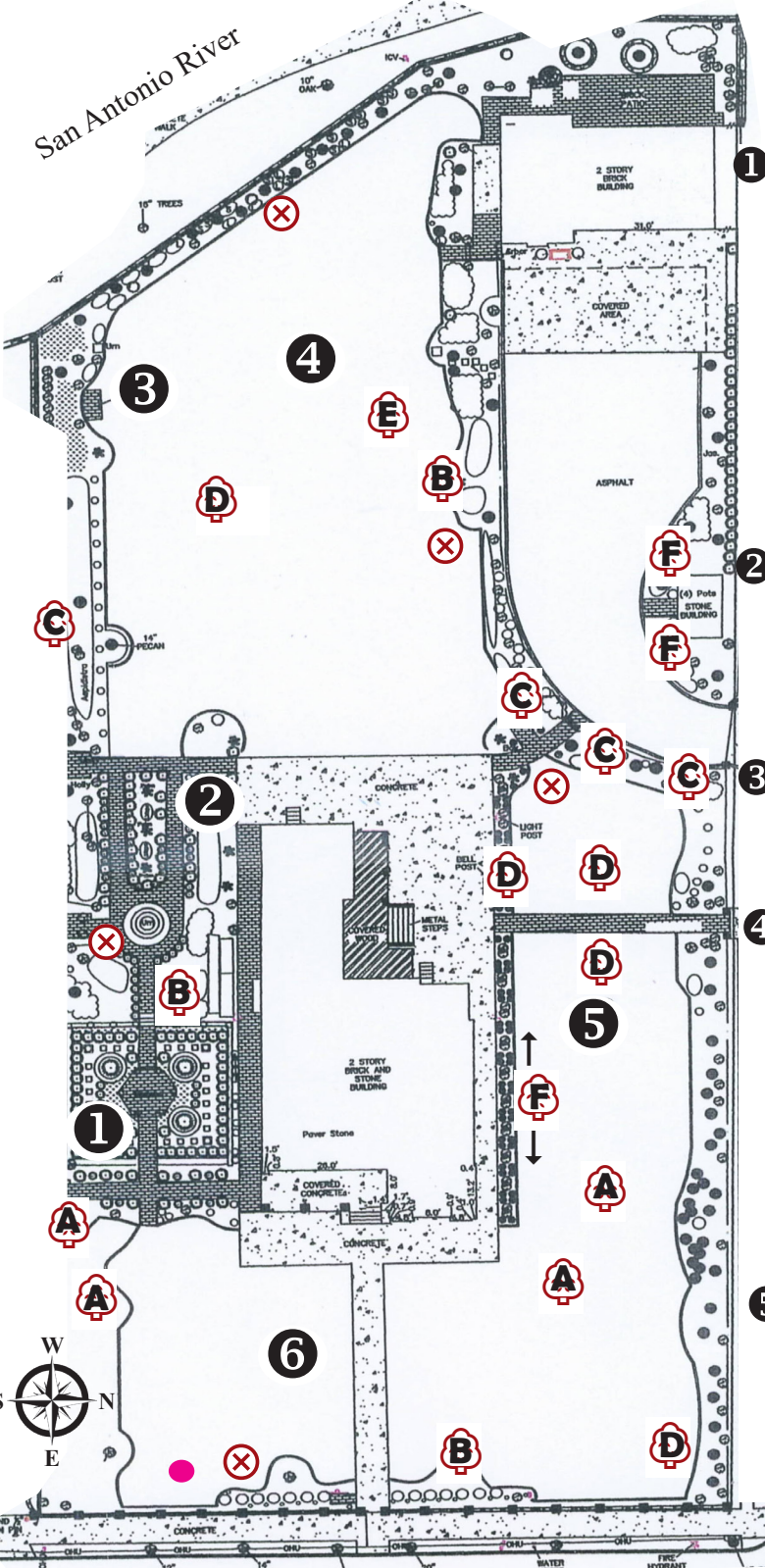
- PLEASE WEAR FACE MASKS & MAINTAIN A 6-FOOT DISTANCE FROM OTHERS
- ENTRY INTO OUR BUILDINGS IS NOT PERMITTED AT THIS TIME
- NO SMOKING. PETS MUST BE ON LEASH.
- PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY NOT PERMITTED WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION

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MUSEUM & GARDENS





For a better tour experience, we recommend that you begin your stroll in the Formal Garden, to the left of Villa Finale's front door and follow around the property clockwise, ending at the front of the house. The **X** on the map indicate additional interpretive signs found throughout. The **A-F** indicate native Texas trees. A key to these trees is found on the back.

**Upper Formal Garden (1967-1970):** The Upper Formal Garden mirrors the house in that this marks the formal entrance to Mathis' grounds. This was the first area Mathis designed in his garden and it is as recognizable in the neighborhood as the home's signature tower. Inspired by simple geometrical "circle in square" designs found in early 19th century Southern gardens, the shapes seem to invite visitors to the open center, the "core." The six columns at the core, which once surrounded the Mathis swimming pool at the Monte Vista property, were transferred here as the focal point to the outdoor retreat.



Upper Formal Garden, April 1970.

For its plantings, Mathis took as inspiration photographs he had seen of the Tobin family home's gardens in South Carolina (this was on his mother's side), the Fulton House gardens in Fulton, Texas, and the Mathis family house in Rockport, all of which were lush with sabal and sago palms and other tropical plants. Note how this area of the Formal Garden is raised for dramatic effect.

**Lower Formal Garden (1971-1985):** As the River Walk project expanded behind the property, the view from the Upper Formal Garden to the river was eliminated, thus turning the garden design inward with the addition of this Lower Formal Garden. The gazebo's domed metal top was added to the columns in 1975, and intimate seating areas were added along the stone wall. Stone statuary and metal vases with ferns reminiscent of Mathis' Victorian upbringing were also added.



Left: Lower Formal Garden, 1970  
Bottom left: Rear garden patio, 1970.

**Memorial Corner:** Mathis' dying wish was to be buried at Villa Finale (so named for it being his final home). His ashes are interred here where family and friends still visit. The engraving on the marker is an excerpt from a poem entitled "The Soldier" by Rupert Brooke.

**Rear Garden (1983-2005):** This area once sloped down into a line of trees and lush plants that lined the river. In 1983, however, the San Antonio River Authority decided to expand the River Walk behind Villa Finale thus ending the site's complete privacy. The project originally called for the demolition of the Carriage House but Mathis used his influence to save the building. The plantings along the back fence are not found anywhere else on the property for they were planted by the city as part of this project.



Fruit trees such as pears, persimmons, and figs were planted around this time to honor some of Mathis' favorite places in Texas. Long gone are period roses planted during this period. During the museum's landscape renovation in 2009, Indian Hawthorn was planted along the back fence in place of roses while along the south fence, antique roses were replanted as in Mathis' day.

**Side Garden (1985-1986):** Prior to the River Walk extension, Sheridan Street saw very little foot traffic which made the need for privacy in this area unnecessary. But as the home's fame grew, so did the need to screen the property from curious eyes with the hedge-like Baltic Ivy along the fence. The Tool Shed, seen to the right of the driveway entrance, was built just prior to 1986 to shield views of the carport and driveway from Sheridan Street. With the best pecans and live oaks to predate Mathis on this side of the gardens, the area became a relaxing tree-shaded greensward still used for large museum events to this day.



Top right: Example of Villa Finale antique rose, 2008.  
North Garden, 1970.