



# MEMPHIS

## *A Fusion of Ancient History and Modern Music*

By Melissa Wolcott and Al Martino

Most of our old southern cities have Native American names, so we were curious why Memphis, TN took the name of an ancient Egyptian city. It turns out that the American Memphis was founded in 1819 in part by General (later President) Andrew Jackson. Based on its strategic position at the head of the Delta of the Mississippi River (sometimes called the “American Nile”), the city was named after the ancient capital of Egypt which was located at the head of the Nile River Delta.

Driving around town, it is apparent that the citizens of Memphis have embraced their connection with ancient Egypt. In 1917 the city acquired two large quartzite blocks, originally part of a palace in ancient Memphis which are decorated with figures and inscriptions of the

26th Dynasty (c. 550 BC) Downtown Memphis, TN, the city built its own pyramid, a huge 80-acre glass and steel special events center. The Memphis Zoo has an entrance which is similar to that of the Karnak Temple in the ancient Egyptian city of Luxor. And the University Art Museum has an impressive collection of Egyptian artifacts. But the most important connection is the Institute of Egyptian Art & Archaeology, dedicated to the study of the art and culture of ancient Egypt. As part of its objectives, the IEAA is engaged with various field projects in Egypt, including sponsoring an excavation in the Valley of the Kings.

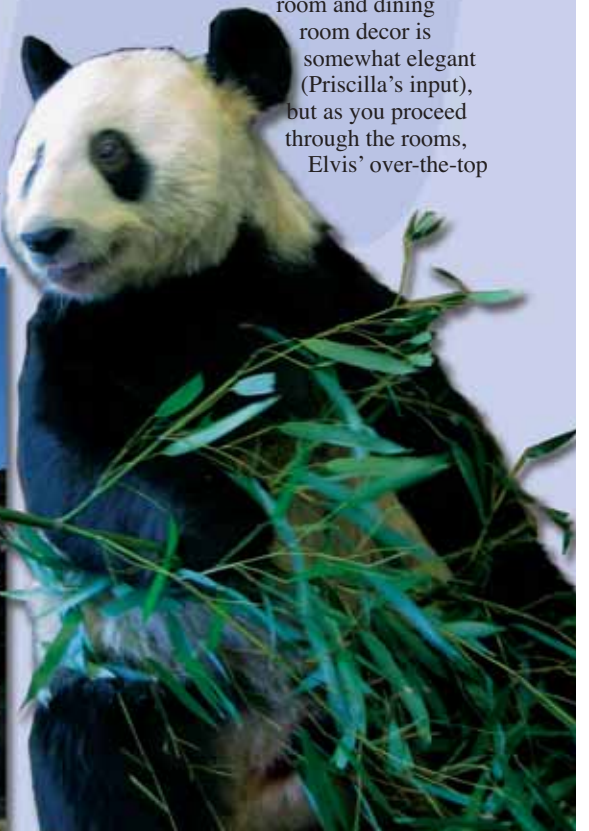
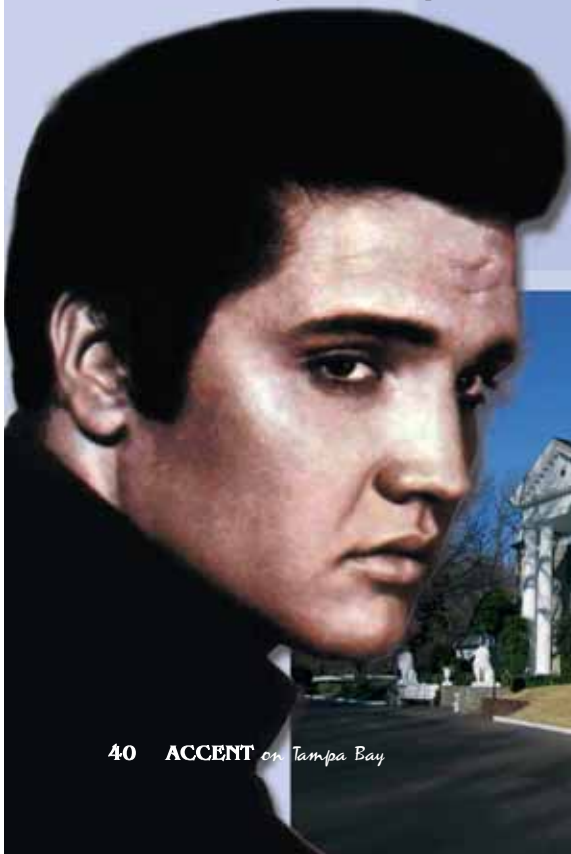
Also driving around town, you are aware that while ancient Memphis may have been the heart of religion, Memphis, TN is the heart of music. It’s all here. Most R&B and country musical greats have passed through and left their mark. Needless to say, Elvis Presley — arguably the most famous music icon in the world — made his home in Memphis, with the equally famous bit of real estate known as Graceland.

Elvis Presley bought the already-named 1939 mansion and 13.8 acres for his beloved mother. Since it is open to the public, we thought we would pop in for an hour and that would be it. That was before we got

there. It turns out the tour is a 3-hour deal. In addition to the mansion are several EP museums, the memorial garden, and 2 of his personal aircraft — not to mention two restaurants and scads of gift shops at every turn.

In the mansion, the rooms are surprisingly small. The public is not permitted in the upstairs level, which contains Elvis’ bedroom and bathroom, and has been locked up like a vault since his death in August 1977. Supposedly, many of Graceland’s long time employees have never stepped foot in Elvis’ private sanctuary. Only his ex-wife Priscilla, daughter Lisa-Marie and the curator are allowed in. It is said that Elvis’ bedroom and bathroom are still exactly the way he last saw them. Nothing has been touched. Underwear, sweaters, and other items are still kept in the dresser drawers. Toiletries are still on the sink in the bathroom.

When you enter the mansion, the living room and dining room decor is somewhat elegant (Priscilla’s input), but as you proceed through the rooms, Elvis’ over-the-top



taste kicks in, and you are thrust back to the height of 70's kitsch. The family room is loaded with heavily wood-carved fake-fur and leather couches and a green shag carpet. Some of the hallway walls are lined with carpet. The mansion is a true excessive 1970's time capsule.

The tour is very well done, including home videos of Elvis in the places you are standing, and voice-overs by Lisa Marie. A lot of his famous costumes are here, and the amount of gold records Elvis acquired is overwhelming when you see them lining the walls of the museums. The property also includes a racquetball court, horses and stables and the memorial garden where Elvis, his mother, father and grandmother all rest. There is a constant flow of flowers, both fresh and artificial, which arrive at Graceland daily since his death. The whole tour is very captivating, and, if you ever enjoyed Elvis' music or just the icon he became, a visit to Graceland is a must.

Although Elvis is the dominant musical force in Memphis, the town is steeped in musical history, with such points of interest as Beale Street, where W.C. Handy gave birth to the blues; Sun Studio, the birthplace of rock n' roll which launched the careers of such musical luminaries as Elvis, Johnny Cash, BB King, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis and many more; and Stax Museum of American Soul Music, the studio that gave us Isaac Hayes, Otis Redding, and Sam & Dave to name a few.

We made a point of visiting the Memphis Zoo when we heard they had a pair of giant pandas. There are only four zoos in the country that have the animals, as they are rare, and all are on loan from the Chinese government. How did little ol' Memphis rate a coveted pair? It turns out TN Senator Jim Sasser was the ambassador to China at the time and was able to score "Ya Ya" and "Le Le" for the zoo. China is very protective of their endangered pandas and to raise money to protect their rapidly-dwindling habitat, they charge zoos about \$1.5 M per year for the loan of these bears. If the bears mate and produce offspring, the baby belongs to China and the zoo has to pay an additional \$.5 M per year for it.

The Memphis Zoo began in 1906 with a bear (that would be a regular old black bear), and has grown and modernized throughout the years into a lovely zoo set in a natural landscape filled with trees. The animal habitats are undergoing improvements to allow more room to roam, and create environments that are natural to them.

Although we were looking forward to seeing the pandas, we didn't expect to be able to be so close to them. The zoo has built a natural outdoor area for them as well as an indoor enclosure. During our visit, they were indoors, and although one was sleeping, the other was very active — rolling around and chomping on bamboo (the animal's staple.) He seemed quite content in his "temporary" home.

The entrances to different exhibits in the zoo are works of art themselves. The entrance to

China (where the pandas are found) has a beautifully detailed Chinese pagoda and architecture. The entrance to the brand new Northwest Passage exhibit featuring polar bears and sea lions is wonderful, with finely carved and painted totem poles lining the pathway. This exhibit is magnificent. The zoo has created a true natural environment for the animals, with boulders, waterfall, downed trees and a pool with plenty of room to swim. Zoo goers can see the bears and seals swimming underwater via a large glass viewing area. The Polar bears were very frisky when we visited, diving for treats and playing with basketballs. This zoo is a must-see.

We left Memphis with much left to see and do, such as the Dixon Gallery and Gardens with one of the south's finest collections of French Impressionist art and 17 acres of formal gardens, and Peabody Place Museum with one of the most extensive collections of Asian art in the country. Also on our next-visit list is the Memphis Botanical Garden with 96 acres of unique gardens, and the Memphis Rock 'n Soul Museum with seven galleries of music history.

Elvis has left the building, and so have we — but we'll be back!

Please visit Accent's website for our photos of Memphis.

For more information on Memphis and these attractions, visit the Memphis Convention and Visitor's website at: [www.memphistravel.com](http://www.memphistravel.com)

## The Absolutely, Positively, Most Assuredly, Ultimate Book on Elvis is...

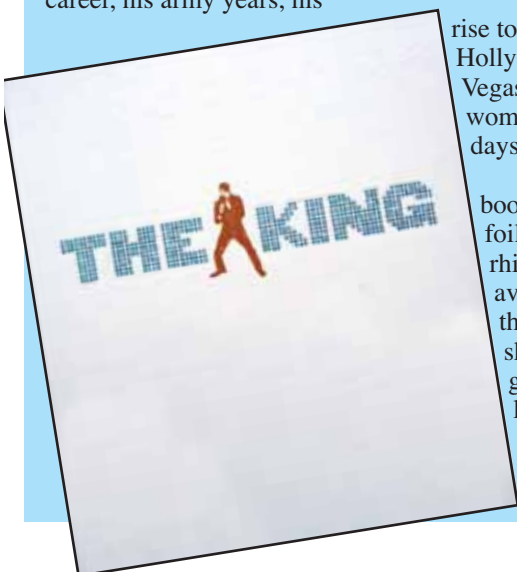
### THE KING by Jim Piazza

You may consider this spectacular salute to Elvis a coffee table book, but you would have to have a mighty big coffee table to hold this tome at 15" X 17". This beautiful 160 page book is packed with 600 photographs, fascinating facts and behind-the-scenes gossip.

*The King* chronicles Elvis' life story, from his beginnings in a shotgun shack in Tupelo, MS to his untimely death at Graceland. Chapters are devoted to his childhood and early career, his army years, his

rise to superstardom, his Hollywood years, the Vegas era, his many women, and his final days.

The hardcover book is designed with foil stamping and rhinestones, and is available to buyers in three different colors, shiny black, white or gold. *The King* is list priced at \$75; ISBN: 1579124623.



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