

he erected another hospital, started up an even more powerful radio station, and built himself a fabulous mansion, complete with a fountain in the front with "Brinkley" spelled out in red neon — a trick he almost surely stole from the Lauderdales. But what he didn't plan on was the tenacity of a fellow named Morris Fishbein, the editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, who made it his life's work to shut down the quack doctor. Among other things, Fishbein noted that Brinkley signed his name to more than 40 death certificates for patients who weren't even ill — until they saw *him*. After hearings and testimony and lawsuits that dragged on for months, the AMA declared, "Brinkley should be considered a charlatan and a quack, in the ordinary, well-understood meaning of those words."

Towards the end of his life, Brinkley — for reasons I can't explain — started referring to Memphis as his hometown. It's true that he met his wife, Minnie, here in the early 1900s, and according to some accounts, they lived for awhile at the first Peabody Hotel. City records confirm they were married here on August 23, 1913. Maybe that's all it took for Brinkley to call Memphis "home." At any rate, after his death in 1941, he was buried in the southwest corner of Forest Hill Cemetery on South Bellevue. When his wife died in 1980, she was laid to rest beside him, as was their son, who passed away in 1976. The majestic bronze figure of "Winged Victory" that guards their graves once graced the front lawn of the Brinkley mansion in Texas.

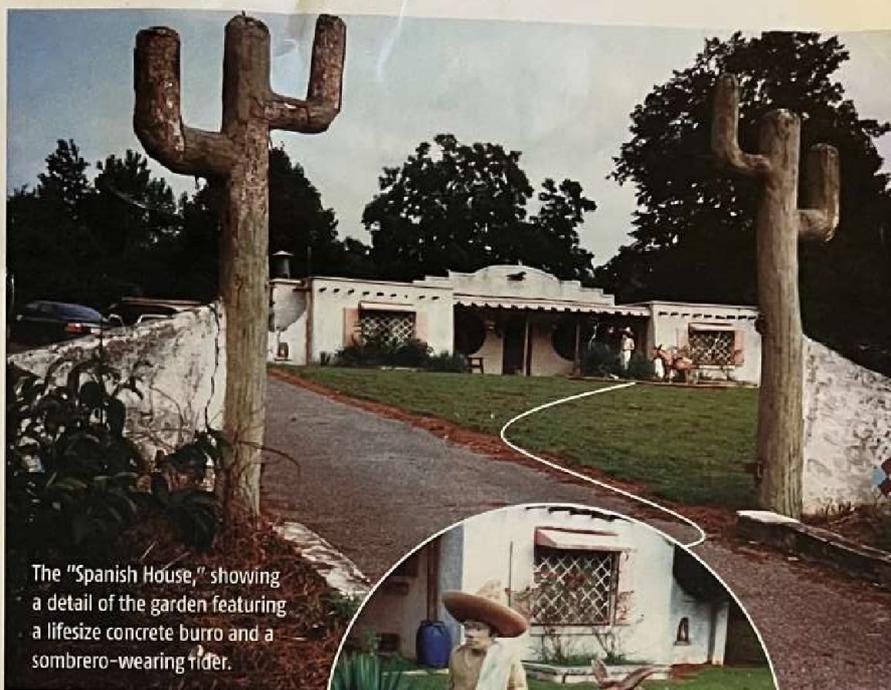
Adios!

DEAR VANCE: When I was younger, I remember driving past a Spanish-style house on Summer, out by the Highway Patrol office, that had a giant cactus by the entrance and even a burro or donkey in the front yard — all made from concrete. Who built this place, and what happened to it? — D.R., MEMPHIS.

DEAR D.R.: Oh, I remember this home quite well, because one summer I passed it precisely 47 times on my way to the driver's license testing station on Summer — well, technically it's Highway 70 past the city limits. After failing the exam 47 times, I finally gave up and hired a chauffeur. The whole system is rigged, I tell you.

The "Spanish House," as everyone called it, wasn't built by anyone from Spain, or even Mexico. It was constructed in 1955 by William Michael Donnelly, a Memphis sheet metal worker. I'm not sure where he was born, exactly, but I turned up newspaper articles that mentioned his fascination with the Old West. A *Commercial Appeal* story says, "As a young man, Donnelly hopped train cars out West. He started taking his wife, Inez, along on his wanderings." When his children were born — a daughter and son — he finally decided to settle down. "Despite his love of the West," continues the *CA* article, "Donnelly chose to bring a piece of the desert with him rather than plant roots so far from home."

The house itself was a rambling one-story building, slathered in white stucco like the old Spanish missions. Out front, as you mentioned, D.R., he built a garden with a lifesize burro and sombrero-wearing rider as the centerpiece. What first caught motorists' eyes, though, were the huge pair of cacti that guarded the driveway. They weren't real. Donnelly crafted them from chunks



The "Spanish House," showing a detail of the garden featuring a lifesize concrete burro and a sombrero-wearing rider.

of telephone poles and concrete, painted a very lifelike green.

I was lucky enough to visit the home in the late 1990s. The grounds were quite attractive, with rows and rows of buttercups, and the yard holding chickens and ducks and even a pet donkey. Although it was essentially a 1950s ranch-style house, inside definitely had some special touches. Matadors and dancing figures adorned an arched fireplace in the living room, and massive beams framed a colorful mural of a Spanish mission in a bedroom. A chandelier had been crafted from a wagon wheel, and old lanterns and the statue of a conquistador decorated a fireplace in the roomy den. Bright tiles added splashes of color to the kitchen walls.

Inez Donnelly passed away in 1995, and William passed away two years later, at the age of 86. The 2.5-acre property, which had begun to look a bit run-down, I'm sorry to say, went up for sale, but nobody wanted the land for a home. So the old house was demolished — they didn't even save the cacti — and the whole area is now a commercial area. I'm still dismayed that I didn't get that concrete burro for the Lauderdale gardens. I offered them as much as 12 bucks for it, too. M

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