



## From homeless to millionaire

*ON a warm and breezy Georgia morning, a tall, toned and down-to-earth Tyler Perry swaggers onto the front porch of his grand palace, dressed to the nines. The 34-year-old new-school playwright, who has, he says, made over \$50 million writing and producing plays for the urban theater circuit, says that his 12-acre estate, nestled some 25 minutes outside of Atlanta, is a brick-and-mortar testament to the rewards of faith. Perry should know; in the not-too-distant past, he was jobless, penniless and homeless.*

“I wanted this house to be vast. I wanted to make a statement, not in any grand or boastful way, but to let people know what God can do when you believe,” he says. “I don’t care how low you go, there’s an opposite of low, and as low as I went I wanted to go that much higher. And if there was an opposite of homelessness, I wanted to find it.” The estate he named the Avec Chateau, a French phrase meaning “with home,” is the opposite of homelessness and a lot of other things.

Valued at approximately \$5 million, it perhaps can be best described as 16,000 square feet of paradise. The rear of the Chateau houses two “prayer gardens,” a man-made waterfall, tennis court, amphitheater and a negative-edge pool that offers the illu-

sion of crystal blue waters flowing into a stream.

Inside the Chateau, visitors encounter powerful, unpredictable decor that plays a melodic homage to the classic, contemporary, and even the medieval era.

The dominant theme in the foyer is medievalism with a life-sized knight in shining armor “guarding” the large double doors, and an equally threatening armored warhorse peeking around the corner.

An aristocratic marble floor, spiral staircase and square interior columns make a seamless segue into the front room where a cool gray wall blends easily with the blossoming crystal chandelier and the mahogany floor. Perry says the gray hue, like many of the other colors (and wood stains) throughout the house, was achieved by accident.

“Do you know how many times I’ve painted this house?” he laughs. “The color scheme was trial and error. In the front room, I was looking for a grayish color and the color that I chose was actually blue. So we painted it several different times until we achieved a light gray.”

In Perry’s vast bedroom, a hardwood maple floor adds vigor to the gentle teal paint on the walls; venture toward the bed, the teal gradually becomes an even softer mint hue. Perry’s elevated Henredon Amalfi Coast bed allows him to better enjoy his



colossal picture windows. Overhead, a bronzed wrought iron chandelier accentuates the floor, bed and furnishings.

Perry's study, where he writes the popular plays that have reportedly fueled \$50 million in box-office ticket sales, is both soothing and stimulating with its cherry wood paneling, large, lightly tinted picture windows and zany leopard-fabric chairs.



*"When I was decorating, a lot of stuff just happened by trial and error."*

"When I was decorating, a lot of stuff just happened by trial and error. When I was on the road, I would send things home that I liked. I just knew that I wanted the study to be really comfortable and relaxing when I come in here to work."

A constant theme throughout the Chateau is the elephant-inspired statuettes and designs, which Perry insists is happenstance.

"I wish I had some great story to tell about my elephants, but I don't," he confesses. "But I do believe that they are a strong, good symbol, and from what

I understand, when the trunk is pointed upward, that means good luck will come to you."

Lady luck wasn't too kind to Perry in the very beginning.

As a poor kid growing up in New Orleans, Perry, the middle of four children, says that his childhood was quite depressing due to poverty and physical abuse.

"I was unhappy and miserable during the first 28 years of my life," Perry reveals. "The things that I went through as a kid were horrendous. And I carried that into my adult life. I didn't have a catharsis for my childhood pain, most of us don't, and until I learned how to forgive those people and let it go, I was unhappy."

Perry found his catharsis in the form of a journal, which began his career as a playwright.

"I was watching the Oprah show one day and she said that it's cathartic to write things down,



so I started writing down the stuff that was happening to me. I started using different characters' names, because if someone had found my journal, I didn't want them to know I had been through that kind of stuff. That's how my first play [I Know I've Been Changed] started, which features a character who confronts an abuser, forgives him and moves on."

Perry says that at the age of 28, he did the same.

"It's nothing like real forgiveness, a deep-down forgiveness where you don't hold any grudges against people," he says. "I forgave [everybody] for the things they didn't know and for the things they didn't know to do."

In 1992, Perry saved \$12,000, rented out a theater, wrote, directed, promoted and starred in his own production of I Know I've Been Changed--and it failed miserably; during its entire weekend run, only 30 people showed up.

When the curtains closed, Perry was broke, broken and homeless.

"I was angry. I was bitter. I was angry at God," Perry says.

For six years after that, Perry held a string of odd jobs in order to finance the show, and sporadically lived on the streets when he couldn't afford to pay the rent. Almost everyone, even his own mother, begged him to quit the theater and find a steady 9-to-5 for good.

But Perry refused to give up. Finally, in the summer of 1998, Perry financed the production once again. And this time, he vowed, would be the last time, if the production failed.

That production of Tyler Perry's I Know I've Been Changed opened at the House of Blues in Atlanta and sold out eight times over. Two weeks later, the play would move to the prestigious Fox Theater and sell out 9,000 more seats.

"After the show, every person who had told me no, every promoter who had turned me down, came to me with an offer."



*When the curtains closed, Perry was broke, broken and homeless.*



## Citrontårta med trädgårdsbär

### RECEPT 10 PORTIONER

- 125 g smör
- 2 dl florsocker
- 2 ägg
- 3 msk kallt vatten
- 4 dl vetemjöl
- Torkade gula ärtor
- 4 citroner
- 2 dl strösocker
- 6 ägg
- 3 1/2 dl vispgrädde
- 4 tsk maizena

Vispa smör och socker i fem minuter i en bunke. Tillsätt ett ägg i taget under omrörning. Tillsätt vatten. Blanda i mjöl och knåda ihop utan att överarbeta. Låt deg vila i plastfilm cirka 1 timme i kylan.

Gör under tiden fyllningen.

Skölj och finriv skal av citroner. Pressa saft i en kastrull och värm med socker tills det löst sig. Blanda vispgrädde, riven citron och maizena i en kastrull. Koka upp. Vispa ägg i en bunke. Tillsätt sockerlag och grädde, lite i taget, under kraftig vispning. Sätt åt sidan. Sätt ugn på 175 grader.

Kavla ut till 3 millimeters tjocklek och klä en rund form (cirka 20 centimeter). Se till att det blir tätt annars läcker citronsmeten ut. Lägg längs med botten och fyll med torkade gula ärtor. Baka i 25 minuter, de sista fem minuterna utan ärtor och papper. Fyll skal med citronsmet och grädda i cirka 40 minuter på 150 grader. Håller flera dagar i kylan.

Servera med sorbet och trädgårdsbär. Överkurs är att pudra över florsocker och bränna med gaslåga.

