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**THE DIRDENS -
DEEP ROOTS IN TEXAS
AND AROUND THE WORLD**



THE DIRDENS - DEEP ROOTS IN TEXAS AND AROUND THE WORLD

By April Garner | Photo by Kim Ortiz Portrait Art and The Dirdens

When Steph and Corrine got married in 2018, it was a surprise. After moving into their new home in Hudson Bend, they invited friends and relatives to a housewarming party, but when the guests arrived, they discovered a wedding! The Dirdens decided that, since their loved ones would be there anyway, why not do both at the same time? Steph says their friends and family were fairly shocked to be attending an impromptu wedding, but they

were delighted.

Corrine and Steph met when she was the appraiser helping him refinance his house in California. He worked for The J. Paul Getty Museum (the only position he held his entire career) and gave her his business card. A few years later, when Corrine reached out to him for her son, who was interested in the museum, she and Steph were both newly single and one date turned into another.



Steph & Corrine in their Prague neighborhood

By the time they met, both of the Dirdens had lived and traveled all over the world. Corrine grew up in Jamaica, while Steph was raised in East Texas. They have houses in Prague and Pomona, CA. So when Steph decided to retire from his 37-year career at The Getty, they had several ideas about where to settle. They narrowed it down to Austin and Miami, but ultimately, the Hill Country won out. "It's calm and quiet but in close proximity to all the city life we are accustomed to," Steph says.

Steph knew his roots were in Texas, having grown up here, but he had no idea how deep those roots went. Two years ago, mid-retirement, he discovered land near his hometown of Jacksonville, Texas, that had been in his family for 143 years. The original owners – Taylor and Lucy Dirden – were formerly enslaved people who purchased it in 1880. Steph made a year-and-a-half-long project of tracing his family tree and discovered ancestors he never knew existed. He even laid eyes on the original, hand-written deed for his family's land, which is among the oldest properties in Texas still owned by the original family. His family has recently been awarded a historical marker for the farm that has never left the Dirden family. Steph looks forward to the dedication ceremony with the State next spring.

Corrine's roots are in Jamaica. She moved to California when she was 13 years old. She says it was a major adjustment, culturally speaking. Basic things like food, terminology and clothes were very different in California. In Jamaica, Corrine had worn a uniform to school, so she was unaccustomed to picking out clothes. She remembers finding her first encounters with Mexican food strange. "It took a solid five to seven years before it felt like home," Corrine says.



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Housewarming party turned wedding.

Now, Corrine continues her career as an appraiser here in the Hill Country, and Steph works on various projects, including as a volunteer for CASA. “I saw an ad for CASA one day and instantly felt like that’s the opportunity I’ve been looking for. Investing my time in kids is what I want to do.” Steph is assigned as a court-appointed special advocate to children who need him. Steph says that after raising two children, he thought he knew about kids, “but the children CASA serves are different. They have experienced trauma and violence and so many other things.” His role is to not only advocate for the children in court but to visit them at home and take them on outings. Mostly, he spends time with them and listens.



Steph & Corrine in Jamaica

Steph’s own children are grown – one son living in Austin and one in California. Corrine’s four adult children live in California. Between the two of them, they also have three grandchildren and one godchild.

When the Dirdens aren’t working or volunteering, they spend time working out five or six days a week, but their favorite exercise is running the five-mile loop in their neighborhood. Sometimes one of them is faster or slower, but they run together unless Corrine has a work meeting. They also travel a lot. “Traveling is a big part of our lifestyle and hosting our many friends around the world who visit Texas,” says Steph.

Their home in Prague is still one of their favorites. Steph originally purchased it in 2006 while on sabbatical there. It was an investment that turned into a third home. They also cherish their time in Greece on their honeymoon. They visit Jamaica and Corrine’s family often and are fond of a recent trip to Turks and Caicos. Corrine fondly remembers their time in Brazil – the Olympics in 2016 and Carnival in 2017. The Dirdens “love to experience other cultures,” says Steph. They tend to migrate among their three homes in Texas, California and the Czech Republic.

When asked what his personal life philosophy is, Steph recounted a story. He says when he first went to work at The Getty, a mentor told him that, generally, if you treat people well, they will treat you well in return. Steph sums it up with, “It’s just nice to be nice.”

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