



Trece and Richard Simpson, the proud owners of the Lyle Hotel Restaurant and Bar, opened to the public December 31, 2014.

Eat, Drink, Sleep Local in Lyle

Lyle couple transforms one-of-a-kind restaurant, bar and hotel

By Drew Myron

Measures of success differ from person to person. Richard Simpson, who owns and operates The Lyle Hotel Restaurant & Bar with his wife, Trece, is no different.

“I’ll go out in the bar and I’ll know everyone,” Richard says. “When you can walk in the bar and hug every person, that’s pretty cool. We’re so lucky.”

That luck is fortified with hard work. With grit and determination, Richard and Trece have turned an abandoned railroad hotel into boutique lodging featuring a gourmet restaurant and lively bar.

The couple opened the doors a little more than a year ago, New Year’s Eve 2014.

“We were really busy, right away,” says Richard.

Patrons have included a blend of loyal locals and international tourists from as

far away as France.

“What’s cool is there’s a variety of consumers here,” Richard says, noting the robust community of hikers, mountain bikers, kiteboarders, and longtime locals and visitors touring the crop of new Gorge wineries.

A Patchwork History

A historic railroad hotel built in 1905, The Lyle Hotel was instrumental in the construction of the SP&S Railway and developing industrial commerce in the Gorge. With its ferry boat landing and the railway transporting lumber, wool and wheat, business in Lyle bustled for years.

The hotel, situated along the tracks and fronting the Columbia River attracted industrialists, workers and tourists for many decades, until the dams were completed and commerce slowed.



Above, The Lyle Hotel has had many owners since it opened in 1905. Right, Richard and Trece serve only local wine and beer, and use only fresh food in the restaurant.



When Richard and Trece bought the historic 10-room hotel in 2014, the hotel had seen a succession of owners and been vacant for several years. The couple quickly went to work stripping, painting, staining and improving the dated rooms and aging structure.

“It’s a real patchwork quilt,” says Trece, noting that a string of owners, each with their own definition of improvement, left little of the original building. “It’s sort of 1980s meets the Edwardian era.”

Working without staff, she and Richard run the show—from reservations to cooking, cleaning, greeting, marketing, and more. Site improvements are done with “work parties” of friends and an occasional contractor.

“It’s a two- to five-year beautification and renovation project,” says Trece. “But I was raised on a farm; I know how to work hard.”

In just one year, the hotel interior shines anew. Infused with light and warmth, the dining room offers comfort and ease, and the guest rooms are adorned with plump linens and a sense of peaceful retreat. On weekends, live music fills out the experience.

The couple plans to paint the exterior to add curb appeal and expand an outdoor patio, adding a pizza oven and fire pit.

A Two-Person Operation

While Trece handles “front of the house,” Richard is behind the scenes as the chef creating a fresh menu of French and Italian influences.

Classically trained, he studied at the California Culinary Academy and worked as a cook with the USA cycling team for the 1989 Tour de France.

Trece grew up in Moses Lake, and later worked as office manager for a construction business. Moving from Seattle to Lyle, neither had worked in the lodging industry.

Still, Richard is thrilled to be combining his culinary skills with his passion for local food and wine.

“It’s gotta be fresh,” he says. “Nothing is in the house more than two days.”

“Our freezer is only for ice cream,” adds Trece.

Everything is made from scratch and the bar offers only locally sourced beer and wine.

“Recipes are a guideline,” Richard

says. “I like inventing things.”

While the restaurant is a draw, it is special events such as weddings and parties that have been most popular. Their special wine dinners, for example, have drawn as many as 50 patrons. These monthly events feature a five-course meal paired with wines from a nearby winery.

Featured producers have included Jacob Williams Winery, AniChe Winemakers and Backwoods Brewing. The chef and winemaker/brewer offer introductions to each course and beverage selection to create a Columbia River Gorge experience.

“It’s a fun event,” says Crystal Borup, operations manager for Jacob Williams Winery. “Richard, Trece and I get to build a meal and the wines to pair with each course. And Lyle is a really unique town. It’s a great thing.”

This is what success looks like for the Simpsons: full guest rooms, a bustling dining room, a humming bar and live music wafting through the hotel.

“Our dream,” says Trece, “is to have the hotel full, and to have the restaurant filled with special events, and to make the hotel what it’s meant to be now.” ■