

Old Hotel Reborn in the Gorge



Innkeepers taking hotel back to decorative roots

By Jeanie Senior

The Inn of the White Salmon is getting a new look. It won't be an overnight change because owners David and Dennice Dierck—who took over in the spring of 2007—are staying open for business while the work is completed.

What already has emerged is a self-described eco-friendly boutique hotel with a European touch.

That's partly due to Flo and Nicole Niemesch, who moved here from Germany on an invitation from the Diercks to share in the new adventure of innkeeping.

David and Dennice both grew up in the Everett area, where they owned a Christmas tree ranch. He also was a battalion chief for the Marysville Fire District. She worked as a Starbucks store manager.

As longtime residents of northwest Washington, they didn't

venture south to the Columbia River Gorge for years. When they finally visited, David says, "we were just entranced."

It was either fate or destiny that brought him to White Salmon in July 2006, at the end of a stint of wildland firefighting in southwest Washington.

David, who had been living out of the back of his truck, arrived during the White Salmon Art Council's

annual Art and Wine Fusion event.

He got the last bed in town because of a cancellation at the Inn of the White Salmon.

The next morning at breakfast, David asked, half-joking, if the place was for sale and learned it was.

When the Diercks took over the bed-and-breakfast hotel, "we inherited a great staff," says David. "That was the first secret of our success."

Several of the facility's 10 employees have worked there for years: Phyllis Hagerstrom—who staffs the office two nights a week—is a 27-year employee, and Office Manager Rishell Graves has been there almost nine years.

The new owners decided they would showcase local art and wine, and promote the region's multiple recreation and scenic offerings.

Toward those ends, there is a changing exhibit of work by local artists in the new Hallway Gallery—the hall that leads to the breakfast room. The Arts Council holds its regular meetings at the inn.

Wine-tastings are held once a month from November through March, including performances by local musicians. The events are open to local residents as well as guests.

The inn also offers B-R-T packages, the title for a variety of offers that include a room and transportation.

The Bed-Ride-Ticket includes a lift ticket to Mount Hood Meadows plus transportation to the ski area in the inn's four-wheel-drive van. Bed-Ride-Thrill involves whitewater rafting or kayaking. Bed-Ride-Trek is a snowshoeing outing; and Bed-Ride-Taste is a wine tour.



Above, Inn of the White Salmon has been transformed into a European-style boutique hotel. Top, a bedroom wall at the inn offers guests a little philosophy.

The skiing package is available for \$69, including a bed in the inn's new hostel room. David calls it "a great bundle."

Hostels, long popular in Europe as a low-cost lodging alternative, are relatively scarce in the United States. But David sees them as a growing market.

"It's the economical way to travel," he explains.

Eight beds are located in the hostel room, which was converted from a two-room suite. The beds are bunks, including one with two queen size beds.

"We've got the only queen-sized bunk beds in the Gorge," David jokes.

Cost for a single hostel bed, including breakfast, is \$25.

A local craftsman built the bunks, which feature a ladder to the upper bunk. All have curtains that close off the sleeping space, similar to the curtains used on Pullman train sleeping cars. Lockers are available to store gear, and there is a communal bathroom.

So far, most of the hostel room guests have been international visitors familiar with the setup, David says.

"They save their money for food and drink, which is the European way," he adds.

As for the entire inn, "our vision is to take it back to the Craftsman era, which was still going on in 1937," he says.

That was the year the hotel—then called the Hoodview—opened.

It was a businessman's hotel for years, until being converted to a bed and breakfast about three decades ago.



Inn of the White Salmon remains the town's only lodging facility.

Bringing the hotel back to its origins, decor-wise, means replacing Victorian antiques, flowered wallpaper and fancy light fixtures with the clean lines, warm colors and simplicity of design that was a Craftsman trademark.

David points out the Craftsman look was a protest—or an antidote—to the Victorian penchant for embellishment.

He calls it "an overdose of doilies."

To date, the innkeepers have redone the breakfast room, added a second sunny breakfast room at the building's east end, and transformed the so-called parlor into a hip family room with suede sofas and a flat-screen television.

David says one of the delights has been pulling out wall-to-wall carpeting and finding clear fir flooring throughout most of the building.

By spring, nine of the 14 guest rooms will be transformed to the new look. Except for a licensed plumber and a licensed electrician, David, Dennice, Flo and Nicole are doing all of the work themselves, as well as handling daily operations.

"We just fill in where needed,"

Above, David and Dennice Dierck continue renovating the inn, which will bring the only hotel in White Salmon closer to its original Craftsman decor and style. Below, David shows the inn's hostel section, which has eight bunk beds and lockers for guests to store their gear.

Dennice says. "It's not unusual for us to be housekeeping, just whatever it takes."

They have changed the breakfast menu. Previously, the menu was more of an elaborate tea with a lavish array of desserts.

Now the breakfast includes breads, local fruit, gluten-free granola, yogurt, cheese, meat, cereal and specialty egg dishes.

People who don't stay at the hotel are welcome for breakfast, which costs \$10. Reservations are advised.

"We try to stay with natural and sustainable items, and seasonal fruit," says Dennice, who says the phrase "eco-friendly boutique hotel" signals it is locally-owned, not corporate lodging, whose owners care about the environment. "We're always researching what we can do to be better stewards." ■

For more information, go to www.innofthewhitesalmon.com or call (509) 493-2335. For reservations, call (800) 972-5226.