



A Nod to Norway

The Inn at Solvang offers peaceful respite

Text and photograph by Linda C. Feltman

A FEW MONTHS AGO, STEPHANIE FISHER, LONGTIME innkeeper for the Inn at Solvang in Huntingdon County, sent a message to my Twitter feed. After nearly 25 years of writing this column that was a first, so I decided that the tenacity to track me down deserved some consideration.

On occasion I have driven by this gracious 80-acre estate along Route 26 without noticing the gem hidden behind all those trees. Located 40 minutes from State College and just 10 minutes from the borough of Huntingdon, the Inn at Solvang is tucked off the road in a private setting surrounded by mature trees and a spacious, well-manicured lawn.

What I discovered upon my arrival is a stately three-story brick inn built in the 1930s in the style of a southern colonial country estate. The home was originally designed and built by Huntingdon attorney C. Jewett Henry and his wife, Phyllis, the daughter of Norwegian immigrants. The couple called the property Solvang (after the Norwegian words “Sol” for sun and “vang” for grassy field) because the land had been farmed for many years and the treeless fields extended far up the hillside.

Strolling through the various rooms in Solvang is akin to walking through history. During their years on the property, the Henrys entertained many notable guests, including the von Trapp family, minus the captain.



Huntingdon County

Their stay there must have made quite an impression. Decades later when the Henrys’ son, JJ, and his wife, Jane, visited the Trapp Family Lodge in Vermont, the youngest von Trapp son still spoke of the hospitality that JJ’s parents had offered his family.

Although JJ and Jane, the inn’s current proprietors, no longer live in the inn, which is managed by their capable long-time innkeeper, Stephanie, I was grateful that they were able to stop by and visit with me during my stay. Jane told me how the sumptuous gatherings that the elder Henrys hosted were a much sought-after invitation. In fact, the affairs apparently became so large and frequent, that the Henrys built a separate “party house” adjacent to their home. It takes little imagination today to visualize the elaborate parties that must have taken place here.

JJ recalls growing up in this home filled with many of the furnishings and collectibles that today’s guests enjoy, including the grand piano and harpsichord in the music room, the abundance of classic books shelved throughout the home, the original paintings and authentic Persian rugs, and even the fine china and silver on which breakfast is served. During the renovation for use as an inn, the Henrys added new vitality to the home with the use of vibrant colors, murals, trompe l’oeil and stenciling.

JJ and his first wife, Pam, who opened the inn in 1994, raised their children here, and it is still their family home in many ways. Following breakfast the next morning, I was able to chat with one of their daughters, Fran Fischer, who had driven to the inn from her home in Bucks County to make a delivery of grits, flours and other products that Stephanie uses for breakfast. Fran and her husband own Castle Valley Mill in Doylestown.

She told me that while growing up in the house she always understood that she had been surrounded by history, which gave her both a strong sense of family and a deep appreciation for her Norwegian ancestors.

More than a beautiful destination, Solvang is a respite offering solitude and reflection. ♡

—Linda C. Feltman has been visiting B&Bs and inns throughout Pennsylvania since 1991.

DETAILS

Inn at Solvang, 10611 Standing Stone Road, Huntingdon, Huntingdon County 888-814-3035, solvang.com, innkeeper@solvang.com

The inn is open year-round with rates ranging from \$105 to \$145, depending upon the room. A ground-floor guest room has a private entrance off the parking area, two twin beds and a large bathroom, providing easier access to guests with mobility challenges. Two second-floor guest rooms offer either two twins or one king bed, and the third-floor guest suite sleeps up to four (with a king-size bed and a second room with two built-in twin beds resembling a luxury Pullman sleeping car) and features a sitting room with a mini library and access to a large balcony. All rooms have spacious bathrooms and are tastefully themed with family heirlooms and auction finds. The house has free Wi-Fi and central air conditioning. A multiple-course gourmet breakfast is served in the morning (special dietary considerations accommodated upon request).