

TRAVEL

Cottage Inn transports guests to another place, time

BY CARA PLOWMAN
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After being greeted at the marina in the heart of one of the most beautiful areas on Mackinac Island, guests of The Cottage Inn are easily swept up in a magical, historic experience.

The 6,000-square-foot, three-story Inn opened Memorial Day weekend and has been entertaining and relaxing guests since, said owner Bob Benser.

Close to the boat docks that bring vacationers onto the island and five miles from the Mackinac Bridge, the Inn features 11 themed rooms with modern amenities in the turn-of-the-century style cottage. It can accommodate couples as well as families and is perfect for weddings and other special occasions, Benser added.

Located near downtown on historic Market Street, Benser said the Inn has restaurants, parks and scenic trails close by, yet it is quiet enough for a peaceful escape.

"You'll get a warm feeling when you walk in," Benser said. The smell of fresh flowers and rich coffee mingle with the early morning risers. In the afternoon, the sweet aroma of chocolate chip cookies may pour out of the kitchen. These personal touches add to the comfortable ambiance.

The land the structure was built on belonged to Benser's father and was one of the last pieces available for construction on the island.

Unique sense of style

The theme rooms separate The Cottage Inn from the other Inns and hotels you can rent. Working with Birmingham-based design company, La Belle Provence, it took Benser 18-months to open the Inn.

Benser's sister Leslie Benser-Luciani owns La Belle Provence and worked on the Inn with designer Gail Cravener. Benser knew he wanted them to do the rooms, so the team brainstormed possibilities and found accent pieces that proved to be the finishing touches in the rooms.

"There's only 11 rooms, so we could be a bit creative," said Benser.

All of the themes are special to Mackinac and include local history. The *Somewhere in Time* room, which was based on the movie shot on the island, centers around a large canopy bed flanked

by pictures of Jane Seymour and Christopher Reeve and is the most popular room, Benser said. It drops couples right into the romantic drama.

Other rooms embody well-known island trends, as in the Lighthouse Tower room, which features a turret. The Lilac Parlor room pays tribute to the flowers that blanket the island and the Bridge Room has vaulted ceilings and historic pictures of the Mackinac Bridge. The large Mackinac Suite is family-size and has three rooms. Benser described the Inn as "colorful and cute" and suggested that guests pick a theme when they make reservations.

Benser said most people stay a weekend, but he suggests they visit during the middle of the week when the island isn't as busy.

"It really takes on a different complexion after the last boat leaves at night."

Not far from the Inn is the Stuart House (an old fur trading center) museum and Dr. John Beaumont's house. It's also close to the Father Marquette park — an early explorer of Mackinac. "Take in all the historical sites," Benser suggested.

"There's so many trails and areas to explore" and great sailing and boating.

Also, the island's marina is right around the corner. Benser described the marina and said, "It's just pretty, I've never seen a prettier spot."

From June to mid-September is the peak time on Mackinac, Benser said. Weekends are filling up and Benser suggests booking soon.

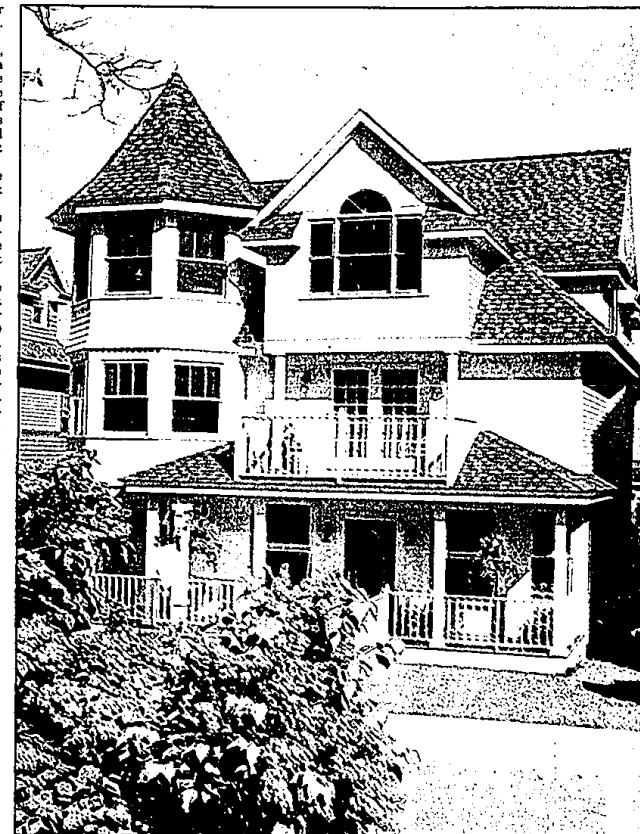
If you go

Where: The Cottage Inn is on Mackinac Island on Market Street.

Cost: During the peak season, a night's stay at the Inn is \$160-\$225.

Reservations: For reservations and information, call (906) 847-3343 or visit www.cottagelinnofmackinac.com

Online: For information about the Island, visit www.mackinacisland.org



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