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# Return to Service

DAVE AND REBECCA GALLAGHER RETURNED TO THEIR EAST COAST ROOTS FOR A 250-YEAR-OLD PENNSYLVANIA TAVERN. BUILDING ON THEIR PREDECESSORS' EFFORTS, THEY RESTORED IT TO A LANDMARK BED-AND-BREAKFAST INN.

BY JEANMARIE ANDREWS | PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARL SOCOLOW



“W E EITHER adopt fifteen children or open a B&B,” said Rebecca

Gallagher, explaining how she and husband Dave came to take over operating the Smithton Inn, a three-storey, nine-bedroom stone house in Ephrata, Pennsylvania.

“I always pictured living in an old house,” she said, never picturing herself tending so many rooms. But she got her wish in 2009 when Dave searched for a new home after they decided to relocate back East from a thirty-two-year tenure in Houston.

Finding the 250-year-old stone inn was an accident. Dave visited his hometown of Hamilton, New Jersey, for a high school athletic reunion and switched on the computer in a spare moment. “I found it on the Internet,” he said.

Actually, he had found it three years earlier, but at the time the owner “had an inflated idea of the value.” That price had changed by the time Dave found it again online—it had dropped by half—so he called Rebecca to see if she still wanted to move.

“We both vaguely always wanted to come home,” explained Rebecca, who grew up in Vestal, a small New York town bordering Pennsylvania along the Susquehanna River.

After college both had headed west independently, settling in Texas, where they met and married. Rebecca worked in corporate marketing for the oil industry while Dave opened a business that sells test instruments for manufacturing, oil refining, and chemical industries.

**OPPOSITE** A dining room table is set with Portmeirion china in anticipation of breakfast guests. The Gallaghers had used the botanical patterned dishware privately, and when Rebecca saw that a colonial inn in Philadelphia used the same English-made pieces, she decided they were appropriate for the Smithton Inn. The window, with 18-inch sills, is framed by toile curtains and overlooks Ephrata’s main street.



The Smithton Inn, built as a tavern in 1763 by Henry Miller II, is set in the heart of Ephrata in Pennsylvania's Lancaster County.

The restoration undertaken by former owner Alan Smith includes this extension of a second-floor room, decorated with a pair of peace doves that bear the characteristic markings of doves found on *fraktur* made at Ephrata Cloister.





The inn's largest fireplace, one of ten, warms the guest living room. The mix of old and new includes sgraffito redware made by potter Lester Breininger, a Windsor rocker, and colonial-style furniture bought by the Smiths. The mantel is lined with pewter mugs, annual designs of inn coffee mugs, and a long-resident whirlingig—all beneath a flat-screen TV. The door at left opens into Dave's office and guest library, which houses a collection of 300-plus movie DVDs.

They thought it might be the right time to return home as their son, Patrick, was about to advance from elementary to middle school for sixth grade. It was also the right time for Dave's business—he had built his company to a level where he could oversee it from afar.

"We'd talked about it for ages and decided we would do it now or never do it," Rebecca said.

"We wanted to get closer to family and friends—close but not too close," Dave added.

Although Dave's mother and brothers now live in Florida and Texas, respectively, he's much closer to old school friends in New Jersey. Rebecca's family is scattered from New York to Harrisburg to Virginia.

"We had both traveled here as kids and knew how pretty Lancaster County was," Dave added.

Three weeks after Dave found that the inn was still for sale, they

bought it, although Dave still hadn't seen it.

"I asked Rebecca's father to look at it while he was traveling from West Virginia to New York," Dave said. "He said, 'If you don't buy it, I will.'" So they did—both the inn itself and the business.

#### STRONG FOUNDATION

Once the deal closed, Rebecca and her father spent two months clearing the property of debris—filling eight 16-foot dumpsters. While Dave tied down loose ends in Texas, Rebecca's dad, an experienced handyman, helped renovate the third-floor attic

**"We'd talked about it for ages and decided we would do it now or never do it."**

as the innkeepers' quarters—after evicting the squirrels.

They kept the inn open throughout the renovation as they painted the rooms, reinforced the south wing with new basement pillars, replaced the roof and added gutters, installed forty-eight new windows, and insulated the rambling structure wherever possible.

"We had large crews working on it," Dave said, "but they couldn't start work until breakfast was over at ten, and they had to be out by 3:30 so guests could check in by four."

The inn was suffering because previous owner Alan Smith had died in 2004, and his wife, Dorothy, found it beyond her ability to maintain.

"Alan gave us the most fantastic base to work with," Rebecca said. The artist and architect, who purchased the property in 1979, "was so the right person to buy it."

As with many buildings of its vin-

tage, the inn had grown through the centuries with additions that lacked a cohesive look and floor plan. "Alan reconfigured it to make the add-ons function and flow," Rebecca said.

The Smiths fashioned their restoration as a tribute to nearby Ephrata Cloister, the 1732 religious community of Seventh Day Baptists founded by Johann Conrad Beissel. The connections between Ephrata and the inn run deep. By 1763 the Cloister had become so famous and attracted so many visitors that Henry Miller II built the inn to accommodate them. Miller's stone inn stands on the foundation of his father's wooden tavern—Miller's father and mother, Clara, had belonged to the Cloister's family congregation and contributed money to the society.

**"We wanted it to look historic but needed to be able to maintain it."**

When Smith renovated the inn two centuries later, he added a bump-out to a 1700s addition, using German building techniques and an overhang that tied it to original Cloister designs. He decorated the wall of the overhang with doves of peace from the Cloister logo. Smith also sandblasted plaster off the original stone, replaced a later wrap-around porch with a columned portico, and added stone walls across the front façade that match those at the Cloister.

Smith's regional tribute extended indoors. He decorated in what Rebecca termed "a more primitive style," with hand-planed woodwork, folk art carvings, and redware.

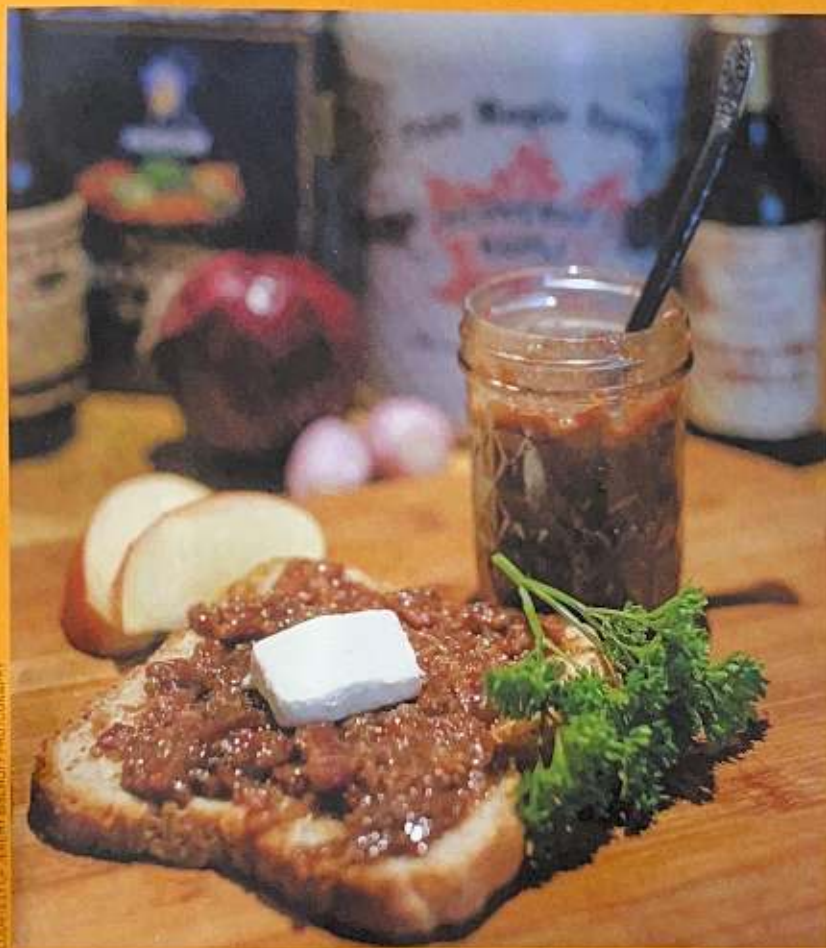
#### MIXING OLD AND NEW

When the Gallaghers took over, they built upon Smith's base, adding locally made Windsor chairs, more redware pottery, old maps showing Ephrata's location, and a framed, hand-crocheted doily made by Carrie Garber, the last Miller family owner of the inn.

"We wanted it to look historic but needed to be able to maintain it," Rebecca explained. For example, they replaced original—but leaky—leaded glass with energy-efficient, noise-reducing windows, to save fuel and reduce the noise from the busy inter-

The dining room is Rebecca's favorite, brightened considerably with fresh paint that pulls the green from the pottery and new curtains replacing their red velvet predecessors. Guests enjoy breakfast at small tables resurfaced by Martin's Chair to match the massive hutch. The company also made the reproduction Windsor chairs throughout the inn. Smith built the hutch using recycled wood he hand-planed, inspired by similar pieces he saw at Ephrata Cloister. It is built into the original plaster-over-stone wall. Its shelves hold redware by regional potters Breiningen, Ned Foltz, and Andy Lesher. A map of New York State from 1776 that shows Ephrata's location hangs on the left wall.





COURTESY OF JEREMY BISHOFF PHOTOGRAPHY

## BRAVURA BREAKFAST

Rebecca Gallagher shared her recipe for Bacon Jam, one of many guest favorites that appear on the breakfast menu. Although some recipes call for discarding part of the fat, her view is, "Hey, if you're going to make Bacon Jam, you might as well go all in!"

### Bacon Jam

1 pound thick-cut bacon, cut into 3/4-inch pieces

1 red onion, peeled and thinly sliced

2 large shallots (or 3 cloves), peeled and very thinly sliced

1/2 cup pure maple syrup

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

3 tablespoons Dijon mustard

3 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Set a large Dutch oven or heavy skillet over medium-high to high heat. Add the bacon and cook, stirring occasionally, until it begins to brown and crisp, 15 to 20 minutes. Keep all the bacon fat in the pan. Lower the heat to medium. Stir in onions and shallots, and cook until softened, 8 to 10 minutes. Add maple syrup, vinegar, mustard, and Worcestershire sauce. Season with salt and pepper. Pour in 1/2 cup of water and stir to combine. Bring the mixture to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer, stirring occasionally if necessary. Cook until the jam has a glossy appearance and syrup-like consistency, about 1 hour.

Allow the mixture to cool for 20 to 30 minutes. Transfer it to a blender and pulse a few times to puree the larger pieces, stopping every pulse or two to stir and check the consistency—it should be thick and chunky, not a paste. Transfer the jam to an airtight container and refrigerate for up to one month. Serve at room temperature on toast, pancakes, or wherever you like.

section where the inn stands.

"We tried to be really pragmatic about it," she said. "I had fun mixing old and new with an eye to people's comfort. Guests shouldn't feel like they're in a monastery on a horrible lumpy bed."

Each room has at least a queen-size bed, private bath, mini-fridge, and flat-screen television/DVD player along with historical touches such as a fireplace, painted blanket chest, and hand-stitched Amish quilt.

An 18th-Century traveler's diary noted Henry Miller and his wife "kept a good and proper house that would not offend a lady," and reported the food to be "uncommonly good."

Rebecca believes the key to a successful inn is upholding that tradition. "It's all about the food," she said. "If the food's not good, it's like having an uncomfortable bed."

Local farms provide much of the fare. Lancaster County is the heart of Pennsylvania's breadbasket where fresh meat, eggs, fruits, and vegetables are as close as a stroll to the farmers' market.

"Local food production is growing exponentially," said Rebecca. "It's foody heaven here."

Dave leaves running the inn to Rebecca and manages his Texas business from a first-floor office. He also maintains the property—"I tend to the yard"—and keeps the inn's information current on social media.

When they started, Rebecca had no professional innkeeping experience, although she had spent time organizing conferences, meetings, and seminars in her role as a corporate marketer in Texas. Dave credited long-time housekeeper Judy Yorty, who retired last fall, with helping them ease in to the hospitality business.

Under Alan Smith's leadership, the inn was a founding listing in the Select Registry, an honor recently regained this year under the Gallaghers' guidance.

### ATTIC SUITE

Their own best customers, the Gallaghers enjoy living at the inn. Their spacious living quarters in the attic contain two bedrooms, two baths, a

The Yellow Room, one of seven guest rooms, has a high-post bed made locally, topped with an Amish sunflower quilt. An afghan crocheted by former housekeeper Judy Yorty—each room has one—rests on a comb-back Windsor by Martin's Chair.

living room, and kitchen as well as exposed beams and skylights.

"It's more 'urban loftish' in feel, so we know we're not at work anymore," Rebecca said. "It's very comfortable, cozy, and relaxing."

"It makes it so we can get away from the inn without leaving," Dave concurred.

The trek up three flights of stairs also helps keep them in shape. "It's like our own gym membership," Rebecca quipped. "It's a challenge but our family motto is 'Embrace the stairs!'"

The Gallaghers believe they have put their personal imprint on the inn, even if some visitors expect a different Dave Gallagher to answer the door.

"There's another Dave Gallagher who went to the same high school and same college as I did," Dave explained. "I lettered in soccer, but he spent nine years playing Major League Baseball for seven different teams. People search for him online and show up here with items for him to sign."

He friended his former classmate on Facebook, and asked the famous Dave what to do when people held out baseballs and asked him—not-so-famous Dave—to autograph them.

Said the major leaguer, "Sign 'em!"

Joking aside, Dave is delighted with the inn experience.

"People appreciate the house, and it was fun bringing it back," he noted. "We won't own it forever. We're the caretakers for this segment of its life and we want to leave it in better shape."

Added Rebecca, "I get to be a stay-at-home mom, run a business, and *live here in this house*. I pinch myself all the time that I get to live here." ★

The Crimson Dove Suite is named for the doves decorating the room's exterior back wall. The largest room, it holds a king-size bed against an original stone wall, a colonial-style sofa, desk, and Windsor chairs.

