

Inn of Many Faces



Regal Looks. As in other jewel-toned rooms, the Chinese-red living room is a mass of classics, here including an Oriental rug, fine fabrics and crystal at the stately piano.

Now approaching its 100th birthday, it's led many lives. Built in 1907 as the first valley home of industrialist Samuel McVitty, it sheltered the Dawson family for more than 50 years. Later, it housed an engineering firm and the YWCA. Now under its second ownership as a graceful inn, this Salem landmark is blooming again. And even the resident ghost approves.



The Grand Manor. *Elegant appointments mark the foyer, highlighted by the gracefully curved and wainscoted staircase.*

Call it a coincidence.
Call it supernatural.

Either way, Cindi Lou MacMackin has seen some strange goings-on firsthand at the Salem residence she calls home. Fortunately, the owner of The Inn at Burwell Place isn't fazed by a genteel ghost who has made her feelings known at her Main Street domain.

Early on, MacMackin heard the stories from former tenants. She never really took them seriously until shortly after she and co-owner/husband Mark Jesse Bukowski began work on the home's second floor. Then, one day when the pair and their interior designer, Lawrence Cummings of Washington, stood in the upper hallway deciding on an appropriate paint color, the hall lights came on without warning... a spooky, unearthly sort of occurrence.

The kind that would shake most people.

Not MacMackin.

"It was Mrs. Dawson," says the Mont-

Fresh and alive. *Today's inn, despite a fire in its second phase, is a mass of beautiful blooms, green lawns and loving extra touches. INSET: The inn in 1990.*

gomery County native of the home's long-time mistress who had raised her son and four daughters in the 8,000-square-foot Colonial Revival and lived there well into old age.

"She's a friendly spirit," MacMackin says with conviction... one who only wants the best for the house.

A Noble Beginning

Though the Dawsons spent more than a half century in the home, it was originally built and owned by Samuel H. McVitty, a Philadelphia native and Princeton graduate who became one of the valley's great success stories: owner of the Salem Tannery, master of an enormous 26,000-square-foot mansion, and a renowned charitable benefactor. McVitty lived in the house, named for Nathaniel Burwell who had previously owned the land, from its completion in 1907 until 1915 when Lewis E. Dawson, an officer with the Salem Tannery, took possession. The house was supposedly part of Dawson's employment agreement.

When the family finally sold the property after more than a half century, the structure provided space for an engineering firm. Later, it was the site of Salem's YWCA for five years. Then it fell vacant.

Finally, the developers came.

Understanding the trend to smaller, multifamily housing, they began building the Burwell Place Condominiums.

"They were going to use the house as a clubhouse," MacMackin explains, but the idea proved impractical. "The house had been vacant for years. It was a mess. It was way too big and too expensive to maintain for a clubhouse. The option was to level the house and build more units." But luck was in the house's favor: Because condominium living was a new concept in Salem, units moved slowly. The developers decided against building more.

Fortunately, more options were on the way.

In 1990, Californian Spence Robertson bought the house and spent the next year renovating it.

"His idea was to turn it into a year-round, small exclusive inn," says MacMackin, noting that over that period, Robertson refinished the floors, stripped away aging wallpaper and improved basics at the home before launching it as a B&B. As fate would have it, personal issues made it impossible for Robertson to continue his dream. Just six years later, he decided to sell.



Beautiful Bonus. The inn's rear terrace offers lush plantings, brick walkways and a charming arbor for the perfect outdoor wedding.

A Chance Encounter?

Some things are meant to be.

What else can explain the way MacMackin and Bukowski happened to get their Salem home?

It was February 1996. The couple and their infant daughter were driving from Arlington to her parents' home in Shawsville for a visit before his job interview with First Union Bank in Roanoke. For no special reason, they decided to get off the interstate and drive through Salem, a place they both agreed they'd enjoy living.

As they traveled down Main Street, they spotted the inn, at that moment lit up like a Christmas tree. The sight stunned MacMackin who was instantly smitten with love at first sight. Believing the house had a new owner who had just turned it into a B&B, she assumed there was no chance of a sale at any reasonable time. Neither she nor her husband saw the For Sale sign, which had just gone up when a heavy snowstorm knocked it down and out of view.

During their stay with MacMackin's parents, Bukowski happened to open the newspaper's classified section to get an idea of real estate offerings and prices in the area. To his astonishment, there was an ad for the house at 601 W. Main St.

The pair swung into action. In no time, they had found the realtor and, after one

viewing, written a contract on the property, subject to a one-week time frame. Within the week, First Union offered Bukowski the job, he accepted and was told to report to work in two weeks. All this, when the couple had not yet sold their own home in Northern Virginia.

"We moved in right away," recalls MacMackin. "We lived in two rooms on the second floor with our baby and rented for six weeks until we finally closed on April 1st. We even rented furniture from Spence because it took a month to get our furniture here. Now all that's left of his things are three hand-carved cherry beds."

Though the couple had intended to occupy the home as a single-family dwelling, they quickly followed in Robertson's footsteps.

"We had guests the first night," MacMackin says, "and we had 100 percent occupancy until last October." That month marked a turning point for the home's mistress and manager. Though she had had a breakfast chef until that time, she decided to quit the B&B industry and operate simply as an inn, concentrating on renting rooms to regular business travelers and continuing to cater for local events and weddings.

A House of Charms

It's not surprising that The Inn at Burwell Place has been a resounding success.

Or that one visitor stayed more than a year.

Both inside and out, the inn is gorgeous and livable.

Much of the credit goes to the owners, who have done everything from painting all main rooms in glowing jewel tones and installing new electrical, air-conditioning and plumbing systems to outfitting interiors with classic walnut and cherry antiques, stunning chandeliers, alabaster lamps, ceiling fans, and elegant draperies and fabrics. The couple has also filled the premises with fine crystal and art objects, including an old, hand-carved Virginia carousel horse and stained-glass panels from Virginia's oldest church.

Besides their own good taste, the couple sought assistance from Lawrence Cummings, a nationally acclaimed interior designer. Together they concocted a bevy of dramatic color themes, including the daring "Old Glory" shade, the dining room's exact match to the American flag blue, Chinese red in the living room and a golden yellow in the cheerful and quaint sunroom. Accenting many of the areas are brilliant tribal Orientals, some very old, some not, all selected by Bukowski who has an eye for art objects and lavish chandeliers, brought in from an antique-chandelier dealer in Maryland and averaging between 1850 and 1910 in age. Making the mix even more intriguing is the presence of the home's original wall sconces in its foyer, breakfast room and living room.

"We did the house room by room," says MacMackin, "starting in the living room. We'd decide on a wall color, get paint samples and live with the samples for a week to make a final decision. Then we'd go through fabric swatches after we'd made the decisions on paint." It took two and a half years to complete the process on the renovated portion of the house – foyer, sun porch, living room,



Warm Welcome. The original master suite contains the home's second fireplace, now equipped with gas logs.

breakfast room, dining room, two suites and two bedrooms, all crisp, warm and lovely with their own baths.

The additional baths, thought to have been added by Dawson around 1925 to accommodate his growing family, posed a special problem for MacMackin. Intent on maintaining the home's architectural integrity, she made it a point to save the bathrooms' original tubs, sinks and commodes, reglazing them several times. But one thing had her stumped: finding materials from the era to replace those that had worn out and been damaged.

"I'd given up on finding matching faucets and the small colored tile inserts," says MacMackin. "I tried the Internet and I talked to the plumber from TV's 'This Old House' who happened to stay with us. Then, I finally located what I needed through a London supplier." Now, repair work is being done in slow, steady steps.

Also of interest: The Bridal Suite, the original master bedroom, which contains the home's second fireplace, since converted to gas, and the pretty sitting-room porch located inside the area and up two steps. As the inn's other suite, it now is outfitted with its own whirlpool.

Like the baths, the home's back wing – housing bedrooms three and four upstairs – was added by Dawson in the '20s. The lower portion of the wing with kitchen and working kitchen, bathroom, and office/storage room has been left untouched.

Family Quarters

With the lower floors reserved for the inn's frequent guests, the couple and their 6-year-old daughter, Sarabeth, spend most quiet hours in the home's upper floor except for the child's fully equipped first-floor playroom dubbed the "Country Room."

Reached by a back staircase finished with the same wainscoting as the dramatic



Patriotic Beauty. Done in Old Glory blue, the dining room shimmers under a stunning antique chandelier that replaced one that fell.



Bright Spot. Expanses of glass, yellow walls and a whimsical, hand-carved Virginia carousel horse light up the sunroom.

main staircase, the spacious upstairs region was originally designed for the owners' maid and cook. Running horizontally from arched window to arched window at either end, the sunlit third floor is divided into attractive relaxation areas with small niches, a long combination playroom-bedroom for the daughter, a comfortable second bedroom for the couple and a full bath.

All floors and moldings have been redone, and MacMackin and Bukowski have installed a tiny but effective kitchen, in addition to the new half-bath for their daughter.

The effect, including a partially uncovered brick wall, is relaxing, private and charming.

A Growing Beauty

While the home's indoor transformation is striking, nothing is more impressive than the inn's exterior Cinderella story.

Besides doing the usual painting and repairs, MacMackin and Bukowski remodeled sun porches and removed the railing that stood between the structure's nine porch columns. Then, working with landscape expert Dean Francisco, their fun began.

Using Francisco's plans, Burwell Place today is a fairyland.

Where once there were parking areas and only two trees, today there are more

than a hundred Leland Cypress, multitudes of roses, lilacs, foxglove, peonies, English ivy, miniature boxwood, clematis, hostas and wisteria, small pieces of statuary and an endearing goldfish pond. At one end of the property, a graceful arbor serves as a backdrop for on-site weddings, limited to 125 garden guests, while upper and lower patios set off with pristine white tents make a picturesque setting, too, for the outdoor bridal receptions that can accommodate 250. Such events are now part of the inn's tradition, as are the annual costumed croquet tournaments, the corporate Christmas parties and the showers of New Dawn roses on the front stone walls.

Now in their sixth year, the couple has still more plans for improving the home they loved at first sight.

The remaining objective: the kitchen area, now divided into a galley room and the wider working kitchen used for setup. An addition that brought food preparation inside for the first time, today's site may someday turn into a personal commercial kitchen with fireplace. A big project with a big projected price tag.

Even so, the idea of more work ahead doesn't bother MacMackin.

When it comes to the time, love and effort it takes to restore a remarkable home, she has the perfect explanation:

"It's a passion," she says. That's reason enough. ☆