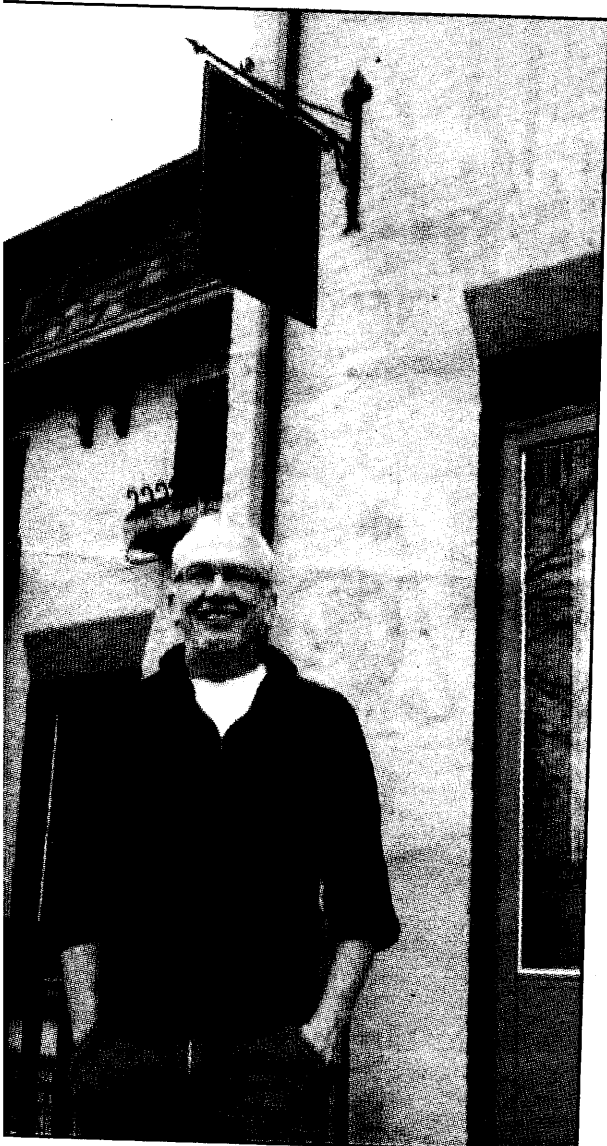




The Valley

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The 138-year-old Russell House has had ups and downs and now its latest incarnation is a stylish bed and breakfast



TOM VAN DUSEN/SUN MEDIA

Currie, co-owner of Morrisburg's Russell Manor B&B, is ready for a grand opening next Sunday.

MORRISBURG — At one time in its 136-year history, the Russell House on First St. boarded up to 17 workers at a time in a portion of its unfinished third-floor attic.

It was during the heyday of St. Lawrence Seaway construction when rooms were at a premium.

The room rental business dried up when the seaway was completed 50 years ago. Morrisburg's original business section was wiped out to make way for the new channel, but the Russell House was far enough back from the river that it was among the inventory of imposing structures to be spared.

A little later, the Second Empire French-style house built by Scottish stonemason Thomas Russell was modified into a group home. That was its function for 40 years.

Room rentals are back in fine style at Russell Manor Bed & Breakfast where a suite occupying the same section of attic will cost you \$150 a night — for two, not 17.

That includes full breakfast prepared and delivered to the room by Rod Currie who, over the past six years, has restored the building and now operates the B&B with partner Michael Burton.

Although it's still a work in progress, partly in honour of completion of the bulk of \$400,000 worth of renovations and partly in honour of the Seaway's 50th, the partners are holding a grand opening next Sunday from 2-5:30 p.m.

It's the culmination of a project which began after

Currie and Burton decided their century home in Ottawa's Chinatown had become too small to contain their big ambitions, fuelled in part by a trip to New Orleans where they fell in love with the architecture.

Purchase of the dilapidated Morrisburg building

for \$110,000 followed a long search for just the right property.

Even if you never stay in the attic or one of the three other guest rooms with rates starting at \$105 per night, an intense sensual experience can be had by dropping by just once to see what kind of transformation can be done by someone with a feel for it.

With Currie concentrating on food preparation and gardening, the inside look of the Manor comes from Burton, an interior designer for more than 25 years who has dramatically deinstitutionalized the building through the inspired use of fabrics, paints,

stencils, lighting and decorations, some of which were acquired at yard sales.

While his forte is Victoriana — another reason for the Victoria Day Weekend opening — Burton says his aim isn't to recreate the period but to adapt it to modern times, not to copy but to interpret what the Victorians might have done decor-wise today.

Along the road to rehabilitation, Currie and Burton have become valued members of the community, says Geraldine Fitzsimmons, a Chamber of Commerce colleague and a director with Upper Canada Playhouse located a few blocks from Russell Manor.

"Not only have the owners created a spectacular B&B, whether it's a fundraiser for the food bank or decorating the hall for the playhouse auction, you can count on Ron and Michael to help out," Fitzsimmons says.

"Every actor from each show at the playhouse is invited to a meet-and-greet evening at the Manor. The owners go overboard to make everyone feel welcome."

With the interior pretty much completed to their satisfaction, Currie and Burton will turn their attention to the exterior, restoring many features depicted in the *Canadian Illustrated News* of 1878 when the Russell House was used as an example of Morrisburg's finer homes "which would grace the fashionable streets of any of our cities."