

A Fine Romance

by Mary Wojciechowski

Love has flourished at the Inn at Taughannock since it opened its doors in 1946. Set in a picturesque hillside overlooking Cayuga Lake near Trumansburg, and nestled beside majestic Taughannock Falls, the 150-year-old mansion and its four surrounding buildings beckon couples from far and near. “We make memories here,” says current owner and romantic at heart Carl Mazzocone. “It’s all about love, romance, and marriage.”

Mazzocone’s affair with the mansion began when he was a film student at Ithaca College. He was a frequent visitor to Taughannock Falls State Park, which surrounds the inn and was once part of the property. The 750-acre park features the tallest single-drop falls in the eastern United States. During picnics by the lake, Mazzocone was captivated by the mansion’s enchanting aspect. With its Victorian façade and lovely cupola, it looks like a larger-than-life wedding cake snuggled into the hillside.

His career as a film producer took him to the west coast, but his love of the Finger Lakes kept him coming back. Eventually, it motivated him to purchase the property last year and undertake its mammoth restoration.

Original owner John Jones

Wealthy Philadelphia business owner John Jones and his wife were the first to fall under the spell of the location. In 1873 they built a summer paradise there; a mansion steeped in luxury with custom-commissioned furniture and diamond-dust mirrors, some of which are still in use today. The commonalities between Mazzocone and Jones are serendipitous. Not only are both Philadelphia-born, they also share a love of art, eye for detail, and talent for design. “My goal is to preserve the integrity of what is still here, and there’s a lot still here,” says Mazzocone. “In a way, I feel like the house is still theirs. I have an enormous amount of respect for what they did and what they built.”

After he became its fourth owner in 150 years, Mazzocone hosted an open house at the inn and invited everyone who had ever worked there. He was overwhelmed when 150 people of all ages attended, almost all of them with romantic stories to tell. More than a few fell in love with and married fellow staff members.



The Porch

The *Ins and Outs* of the Inn at Taughannock

Open year-round, this boutique hotel and restaurant consists of five buildings and 24 bedroom suites in both Victorian and modern styles. Amenities include continental breakfast, free wi-fi, a complimentary laundry facility, and a pre-arrival shopping service.

The Main Inn, an 1873 historic beauty, features six bedroom suites decorated in Victorian style. The Main Inn houses the restaurant and bar, and features an outdoor deck with a fire pit, a lower lawn area with a fire pit, and a patio.

The Hillside guest house can be rented by room or in its entirety. It features a kitchen, living room, dining room, four bathrooms, and five bedrooms.

Edgewood, a modern building, features 10 lake-facing bedroom suites, each of which has a balcony or patio. It also houses the inn's complimentary laundry facility.

Parkview is a pet-friendly cottage with three king-size bedroom suites.

The restaurant, with its American Mediterranean flare, is open April to October, Thursday through Sunday, as well as major holidays. It is also available year-round for private parties. Dinner is offered on Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday from 5 to 10 p.m., and Sunday 5 to 8 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays, a la carte breakfast is offered from 8 to 11 a.m., and a la carte brunch is offered from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The cozy bar leads out to a deck with a great view of Cayuga lake and an inviting fire pit. It's open for guests' convenience Thursday through Sunday from 5 to 11 p.m. Additional hours can be arranged.

For reservations, visit t-farms.com, call 607-387-7711, or e-mail info@innatoughannock.com.

For catered events, contact Damita Chamberlain at damita@innatoughannock.com.



Front Desk



North Lake Suite



Another view of the Porch.

The realities of renovation

Despite its beauty and charm, the mansion needed extensive repairs. Before the inn opened in the spring of 2016 – just six weeks from the time Mazzocone got the keys – the house required a series of updates, both structurally and aesthetically. His team furiously painted walls, put in new light fixtures, fixed crooked headers, and removed inappropriately placed ceiling fans. Renovating a 150-year-old historic building is complicated, and each update proved to be a lengthy and costly process.

But the details reflect Mazzocone's respect for the estate. Staying with classic, elegant design choices perpetuates the sense of sophisticated luxury that defined the original house.



For the John Jones dining room, a geometric wallpaper pattern was chosen to gracefully complement the original ceiling design and Victorian plaster medallion. The mansion's previously straight bluestone pathways were changed to more romantic curved ones. The newly constructed stone entranceway that leads from the park to the inn consists of curved stone benches designed to give guests a welcoming hug.

Other welcoming touches include romantic music playing at the hotel entrance, and the blankets provided to keep guests warm during nights by the outdoor fire pit. At the front desk is a photo of the inn created from a 100-year-old negative. "When I look at that photo, I think about all the people who walked up those steps and spent the night here," reflects Mazzacone. "I ask myself, 'How many people has this place touched?' 700,000? A million?

It's humbling."

As the renovation continues, the goal remains to honor the integrity of the house while creating a beautiful aesthetic that modern guests can appreciate. The renovated bathrooms, for example, feature Carrara marble and an impressive Roman basket weave floor pattern. "I wanted to pick a material that is both period correct and meaningful today," says Mazzacone. "Carrara marble is timeless."



The Cupola

If the Inn at Taughannock looks like a wedding cake, then the cupola is the topper, and there are big plans for this little room. After some minor renovations, it will become an intimate dining space for two to be used on special request. Architect Jason Demarest also hopes to add a period-correct copper spire on top, adding to the house's grandeur and completing its look.





Before



After
John Jones Dining Room

What's next?

Love seems to be the driving force behind the plans he is drawing up with architect Jason Demarest. Tacked up prominently on his office wall are the architectural renderings of a wedding dreamland. A period-correct stone carriage house and stables will house additional luxury suites and a cocktail area. Gothic arches and four small reflecting pools, identical in design to the original Jones dining room ceiling, surround a patio for romantic outdoor weddings. One of the small cottages on the property will become a luxury salon and spa, designed with bridal parties in mind. "As a filmmaker, I've learned how to deliver magic on the screen, and I want to create magical experiences here too. We're going to make this a place where brides' dreams come true," says Mazzocone.

The Inn at Taughannock has been a romantic paradise for as long as the mansion has been standing. Carl Mazzocone has honored and built upon that tradition. The inn's timeless beauty, expert craftsmanship, and touches of luxury will attract generations to come. Whether guests stop in for a week, a weekend, or simply for a meal, it is likely they, too, will fall in love with this picturesque spot on Cayuga Lake. ↻

The Flatsawn Baluster

A common feature of Victorian houses was a "flatsawn baluster" made from a flat piece of wood cut with intricate designs. In true Victorian style, Carl Mazzocone designed his own flatsawn balusters for the inn. While he used some classic design elements such as the fleur de lis and gothic arches, he also incorporated some distinctly meaningful elements. Look carefully and you'll see a "T" for Taughannock Falls sitting above a series of grooves resembling a waterfall.

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