

Urban location and Victorian charm mix at Como Park B & B

by Sabra Waldfoget

Dennis Carter, co-proprietor of the Wynne Inn in Como Park, says that his bed-and-breakfast is impossible to miss from the street.

He's right. The 1886 structure is painted in colors that would have delighted the Victorians: lemon yellow with turquoise trim.

Carter and his wife, Sue, opened their B & B last year just before the State Fair began. Its full name is Crystal Dreams B & B at the Wynne Inn.

Their guests come from all over, Dennis says. Sue adds, "Anniversaries are the top reason."

Inside, the house is decorated with similar Victorian exuberance. The entryway is painted in another bright color, apple green, and furnished with a mix of antiques—a French velvet-upholstered kidney bench from the 1750s, a stand with a painted backplash and lots of mirrors.

"The rule of thumb is one mirror per room," says Dennis. "We have one per wall."

The living room has a huge bay window that looks out over the rail yard. Despite the proximity to the railway, the street is quiet.

The Victorians hated an empty space, and the living room has the Victorian joy in decoration: oversized furniture, knickknacks in the china cabinet and on the mantel, and pictures and mirrors on every wall.

"We went with oversized stuff," says Dennis, "so we felt we could get away with bold colors. They're almost like trim colors."

The effect is cozy and comfortable, a Victorian parlor that makes you want to spend the day in front of the fire.

All three fireplaces in the house—one in the living room, another in the dining room, the third in the guest room upstairs—are decorated with period tile.

The fireplaces were originally designed to burn coals and likely heated the house. Dennis and Sue have replaced them with gas, but instead of logs, the mechanism is masked by heaped coals.

Dennis' background is in food service and Sue's is in property management. When they visited Duluth for Dennis' high school reunion, they stayed in a B & B. They looked around and the light went on, saying to each other, "We could do this."

The Carters planned to buy an old Victorian in the

countside. But after only four months of looking, their real estate agent called to say that this one was the right year, the right shape and smack dab in the city. The house took their breath away and they bought it.

Built in 1886, the house has always been connected to the railroad. The original owner, Herbert R. Morrison, was a stationer for the Great Northern Railway, in charge of tickets, scheduling and probably payroll.

He was rumored to have been on a first-name basis with the railroad magnate James J. Hill. Morrison spent \$5,000 on the house, a substantial sum at the time.

Two doors down are other houses with a railroad past. According to Dennis, "The second house from this one was supposed to be a rooming house for railroad crews. The house next to it is the only house on the block set to the rear of the property. It was the servants' quarters. They took care of all three houses."

The Morrison house needed restoration. The woodwork that had soaked so deep into the pine that it couldn't be removed. The Carters had new woodwork constructed to replicate the original. When they took down the woodwork, the walls began to crack, so they fixed the walls. In so doing, they discovered that the house needed insulation. It took more than two years to get everything into shape.

As they restored, they also furnished. "I used to think that antiques were for people who needed to get a life," says Sue. Dennis quips, "People who have a life need to get antiques."

There are three books on their living room coffee table: a guide to Minnesota B & Bs, the

Holy Bible and Schroeder's Antiques Price Guide.

The Carters are both collectors who love beautiful things from the 1800s. The house has an eclectic mix.

The earliest piece is an English washstand from the 1650s, damaged by being turned into a TV stand. The latest piece is a family heirloom, a 1910 Arts and Crafts sideboard.

Most of the furniture dates from the mid to late 1800s, the same period as the house, with some newer accents. Sue calls it a mix of antiques and "newtiques."

Upstairs, they have a guest suite and an overflow bedroom. The guest suite has a tiled



The Wynne Inn is a new bed-and-breakfast at 1483 Wynne Avenue in the Como Park neighborhood, owned by Dennis and Susan Carter.

fireplace, a bed with an ornate carved French headboard from the 1850s and a tabletop fountain that makes a calming sound.

The B & B is close to the Fairgrounds, fulfilling Dennis' "lifelong dream to live close enough to walk to the fair."

It's also within earshot of the Saints' games in the summer. When the windows are open, Dennis says, "we can hear the Saints games from here. They announce how many trains went by during the game. At the end of the game they announce 'St. Paul 4, Fargo 3, trains 3.'"

There are many B&Bs in the countryside, or in quaint small towns, or in historic urban areas. There aren't too many in a Victorian railroad manager's house that still overlooks the rail yard and manages to be cozy and peaceful at the same time.

For anyone whose idea of home is a Victorian parlor, the Wynne Inn is the right place.



The Wynne Inn dining room has one mirror per wall.