

## ***The Dutch Hearth Inn***

In 1971, Jean and Madeleine Morel bought a very old beautiful building in the middle of Hillsdale, New York, near the Massachusetts border. This had been a hotel, restaurant, and meeting house for 200 years, and was called at the time the Dutch Hearth Inn.

At the 4 corners in this small upstate town stands a majestic brick building. Built in 1789, this building has seen many families and functions over the centuries. Now it is emptied, barren, but not abandoned. You would think of a beautiful old lady, waiting to be dressed up for the next ball. Ed Herrington, a local businessman, has owned the building for many years, and feels he owes it to the town, and to the building, to find a good future for the Dutch Hearth Inn.



Jean Morel was from Bourg-en-Bresse, in France, and had moved to Paris to apprentice and learn his craft. This is where he met Madeleine. They moved to New York City in the early 60's, and worked in the finest French places in town. Chef Morel was at one point the Chef of Lafayette, and of La Grenouille. He was recognized before his death by the French government as Maitre Cuisinier de France, a remarkable feat for a Chef living in a foreign land. The Morels owned the building and restaurant for over 25 years. In 1978 they renamed the restaurant "L'Hostellerie Bressane", in honor of M. Morel's origin. In 1995 they sold the property to another restaurateur, who was not as successful. So it became the property of a real estate group headed by Mr. Herrington.



I worked for the Morels in the early 70's, while I attended culinary school, in the dining room, and later with Chef in the kitchen. My name there was Petit Jean. I have memories of each room in this great building, such as the elegance of each wall and staircase, and the sounds of full and happy dining rooms. There are four dining rooms, plus the bar area, and a reception room, which in the day was lined with thank you letters from very satisfied guests. Upstairs were four elegant hotel rooms, plus a few other rooms, including the little back room that I lived in for a while. The history of the building was evident from every corner. Families had lived here for 200 years, and the house had not been dramatically changed in that time. The cellar was extraordinary, as it was used in the past as the old town jail, bars and

all. Jean Morel kept his extensive wine cellar in this room, perfect for the hundreds of fine bottles served daily at The Dutch Hearth Inn, and at L'Hostellerie Bressane.



The Dutch Hearth Inn held about 75 seats, not including the bar area. On most nights we would do about 100 covers, with Mrs. Morel firmly in charge of the dining room flow. Her mother Mimi was around all day long, and sometimes at night to help out. The average entrée was probably \$20 - \$30, the average bottle of wine was probably \$15, and the average check was I'd say \$55. All a la carte. I think you could multiply these numbers by 4 to have an idea of what a meal would cost today. The average meal was four courses, all prepared or plated tableside, with much in the way of carving and flambéing. Although the menu changes over the years, in my day I served much in the way of Pea Soup with Sorrel, Watercress and Mushroom Salad, Rack of Lamb with Eggplant Provençal, Turbot Hollandaise, Daube de Boeuf, Pheasant Rouenaise, Roast Squab, the dessert table in the hall, or Crepes Suzettes for dessert. The cheese platter displayed was of the finest cheeses available. The wine list was extensive and expensive, and I tasted every single wine on the list over the years. I can still remember the Haut Brion '61, and how it was tawny in color, ran in legs down the side of the glass, and had a gentle bite that didn't come on until after you finished the sip.

Over the years many good folks have worked with Jean Morel, and have gone on to national attention. Rick Moonen, Kerry Simon, Brian Alberg, Michael Balen, and Ali Barker are all alumni of Jean Morel's kitchen. His brigade system was classical in origin, and many people worked in very tight quarters, with precision cooking and timing required by all. Work began at around 8 every morning, with Chef Morel visiting the dining room at the end of every meal, and leaving the house at around 9 or 10 every evening.



Ed Herrington was nice enough to let me wander around the Dutch Hearth Inn recently. It is not sad. The building is gorgeous, just empty. There are flashes of the old brilliance, such as the magnificent copper bar, and the bathrooms wallpapered with old wine labels. But, each room is stripped bare, and the kitchen is totally emptied.



Ed and I entered the building from the north side, what was the back kitchen entrance. It is dusty and crusty back here, no equipment left at all. The house is cold and still. We go past the waiter station, into the main hall. You might catch a glimpse of past grandeur if you look at the wide planked floor, and the dusty wallpaper. Ed said quite frankly that the building is

structurally perfect, and it is his duty to keep it that way. He did some major roof work over the bar area, but aside from that, the building is how he received it, just a little emptier.

We turned left, past the two west dining rooms, into the bar. Although it is empty, you know that this is the grand entranceway to a fine restaurant. The copper bar shows through the dust, and all this room would need is a few hours cleaning to be magnificent. There are two public bathrooms here, each wallpapered with the labels of hundreds of wine bottles, all of course from before 1970. I do hope that any future owner of the building will preserve the copper bar and the wine label walls, they are irreplaceable. The dining rooms are still very pretty, even with no wallpaper, and no furniture. The grand fireplaces still stand tall, and the floors are just dusty and scratched. It is easy to imagine the rooms full and aromatic.



There is not much else to say about this building but that she is waiting for the next act to start. She is not going anywhere, and she is under good hands, under the stewardship of Ed Herrington. The restaurant and hotel market has changed in taste 40 years, and it will probably not be the same sort of hotel and restaurant that Jean and Madeleine Morel created. In fact, there is no chance that it will be the same sort of restaurant that Chef Morel created, because that kind of restaurant is quite rare. Although there are many businesses and Chefs who say they are on the level of Jean Morel, there is only a handful.



So, most likely a new and different business will be created in the walls of the Old Dutch Hearth Inn. Maybe it'll take its name from one of the building's older names, Foster House, Ten Broeck Place, and The Elmwood Inn. It will never be the same as the fine restaurant created by Jean and Madeleine Morel, but there will be great history to build on. Maybe it'll become a completely new business for its third century. In the meantime, this beautiful house stands tall over Hillsdale, dusty but ready for the next act.

