

## Chapter 1

# The Breakfast Club

**A** romantic room for two in a historic home, aglow with the patina of lovingly restored antiques, the luster of fine china, and the sparkle of silver. A fire crackles in the hearth and the rich scents of fresh coffee and homemade cinnamon rolls waft up from the kitchen. It's the picture most people conjure when they consider a stay at a bed and breakfast. And it's an accurate portrait.

But not the only one. Bed-and-breakfast lodgings with a twist are typically found in historic homes, from Revolution-era townhouses to Queen Anne mansions to Craftsman bungalows. But B&Bs also occupy such nontraditional buildings as colonial taverns, 1890s schoolhouses, Roaring '20s banks, Victorian lighthouses, and a panoply of other structures steeped in history and romance. And you'll discover wonderful bed and breakfasts in modern Manhattan high rises, on working dairy farms and cattle ranches, and in many a new home perched beside a river, lake, or the sea.

The quintessential bed and breakfast is located in a seaside hamlet, ski resort, or quaint Victorian village. But you'll also find B&Bs in bustling metropolitan midtowns, desert oases, and classic middle-American small towns.

### BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

What exactly is a bed and breakfast? It's a sort of hybrid between a luxury hotel and a private home, embodying the best of both worlds. A B&B is generally a small establishment with four to ten guest rooms instead of the 50 to 100 or more found at most hotels. The owners live on-site and interact with travelers as if they were invited guests rather than anonymous temporary room numbers. And guests are treated to lots of little deluxe touches like chocolates on their pillows, turn-down service (blankets thoughtfully turned down before bedtime for the pampered guest to slip into), and baskets of bath and beauty products set out on whirlpool tubs.

Of course, there's the "breakfast" in bed and breakfast, a sumptuous home-cooked repast that comes with the price of the room and is served each morning in a communal dining room or in the guest's own quarters. This is not the chain hotel's "continental breakfast" of cold, dry cereal in tiny boxes and sweet rolls wrapped in cellophane, but a morning feast that can range from pancakes made with fresh-picked blueberries to fluffy omelettes stuffed with herbs and cheese to banana breads made from scratch and still hot from the oven.

Bed and breakfasts also tend to feature frosty glasses of iced tea or lemonade on the porch on hot summer afternoons, cups of cocoa after sleigh rides on wintry afternoons, plates of cookies in the kitchen, sherries in the library, or wine and

### Stat Fact

**According to Smith Travel Research, the average B&B room rate is \$90.88, up from \$66.65 10 years ago.**



cheese in the parlor on dusky evenings—all a part of the room rate.

### POPULARITY POLL

No wonder bed and breakfasts are so popular . . . and becoming more so all the time. According to the New Jersey-based Professional Association of Innkeepers International (PAII, pronounced “pie”), in 1980 there were a relative handful of bed and breakfasts/country inns—1,000 properties that hosted 1 million guests. Today, that number has swelled to 20,000 properties and a \$3.4 billion industry.

### THE POWERFUL LURE

As you can see, bed and breakfasts are embraced by travelers and entrepreneurs alike. There are as many people who dream of owning that idyllic B&B as there are people who dream of staying in one. More and more vacationers and other travelers choose the bed and breakfast over conventional hotels and motels for the ambience—the comforts of home (not your own hectic one but Grandma’s or Great Aunt Nell’s old-fashioned one) along with candlelight and romance.

Add in safety and family life. Many travelers, especially single women, feel far more secure staying in a relatively small private home than in a large, impersonal hotel. And many more travelers—men and women—who are frequently away from home on business or other trips relish the feeling of staying with “family” that comes with the B&B and that chain hotels can’t hope to provide.

On the other side of the reservations desk, thousands of would-be innkeepers fantasize about owning their own B&Bs. The lure of escaping the 9-to-5 grind to live, work, and play in a beautiful home nestled in a resort or small town is a powerful one. When you can spend your days puttering about in the kitchen or garden, meeting new people, entertaining guests in a lavish and enviable setting, and collect an income while you’re at it, who wouldn’t leap at the chance?

This is, of course, a fantasy. “People have a romanticized view of the B&B,” says Michelle Souza of Nutmeg Bed & Breakfast Agency, a reservation service in West Hartford, Connecticut. The reality involves far more work than guests ever see and most would-be innkeepers ever imagine. But it’s still an extremely alluring dream. And it can be a fulfilling reality, if you’re willing to work hard to achieve it.

### COFFEE CAKE AND EARNINGS, TOO

Besides the basic dream of having your coffee cake and earning a living from it, too, people typically become bed and breakfast owners for the following reasons:

▲ **To escape the rat race:** Corporate employees who discover that they really don’t

want to wear a suit every day, report to someone else, let the company set their income rate, and live by the company's rules turn to the bed and breakfast as a way to exercise the management and people skills they've learned while being their own boss. Homebased businesses are becoming more prevalent each year with new entrepreneurs finding new market niches to fill. And what business could be more homebased than the bed and breakfast?

▲ **To supplement income:** People with retirement income find the bed and breakfast a delightful way to add to their earnings while keeping active and expanding their horizons. The B&B can also be a terrific way for younger families to supplement the income of a single breadwinner. Dad—or Mom—can go off to work while the other half stays home with the kids and guests. And many divorced, widowed, or otherwise single people choose to run small B&Bs while working full time as an alternative to taking in a roommate. It not only supplements their income but provides companionship—as often or as infrequently as they choose to host guests.

▲ **To live in a resort area:** Lots of people dream of living in a ski resort, seaside town, or charming country village, but the reality of trying to earn a living in such an area usually throws cold water on the most fervent ideas. Corporate jobs are few or just plain nonexistent, and service occupations—waitstaff at restaurants, construction worker, lifeguard, or lift operator—are both seasonal and low-paid. So some vacationers who fall in love with a resort area start a bed and breakfast to provide jobs, income, and housing all in one.

▲ **To purchase a historic home and write off its remodeling costs:** Some people fall truly, deeply, and madly in love with old homes and hear a siren's song to restore them to their former grandeur. This is incredibly expensive. Plaster, paint, woodwork, reproduction hardware and fixtures, not to mention structural shoring up and all those elegant antiques, can require the assets of all of Gringott's Bank. But if you purchase the home with the purpose of converting it to a paying bed and breakfast, you can write off the costs of remodeling and renovation and, eventually, allow the house to pay back those costs and earn revenues.

▲ **To indulge a love of entertaining:** Some people are born hosts who love nothing more than entertaining guests, regaling them with just the right anecdote for the occasion, serving lavish food and drink, plumping up the pillows, and polishing the silver. For these folks, the bed and breakfast is the ideal venue to showcase their hospitality talents while earning an income at the same time.

### Stat Fact

**According to PAII, 79 percent of innkeepers are between the ages of 35 and 64 and 88 percent of innkeepers live on the premises.**



## Breakfast Perks

**One of the perks of running your own B&B is the potential for a sideline business that can neatly tie in with your lodging business.** If you're a master gardener, for instance, you might grow flowers, herbs, or vegetables in your backyard. Not only will they be a draw for guests, but you can add to your income by selling them at your local farmer's market. If you're a crafter, you may find that being at home gives you a terrific opportunity to make products to sell at flea markets and art festivals—and, of course, to guests, who'll be fascinated by your talents. And if you've got a commercial-quality kitchen and a flair for baking, you may decide to spend a little extra time at the cooker and turn out cookies, muffins or other delights to sell to local coffeehouses.

All this depends, of course, on your own particular talents, capacity for work, and how busy you'll be with guests. But many innkeepers find that their "hobby" is a wonderful way to earn extra income as well as enchant guests.

## THE PROFIT FACTOR

Whether you'll go into the bed and breakfast business for any or all of these reasons, or for some other reason entirely, is up to you. But no matter what your motivation is, you'll want to know the profit factor. What revenues can you expect as a bed and breakfast host?

The answer varies a great deal, depending on the number of guest rooms in your B&B, the seasonal (or not) nature of your locale, the length of time you're in operation, how creatively you promote your business, and how hard you want to work.

Keep in mind, however, that the bed and breakfast is not a high-income industry. "This is not a business you go into to make a lot of money," cautions Nancy Sandstrom, a former lecturer on B&B startups and now in her sixth year as an innkeeper. "You can make a profit, and many of your personal expenses are semi-covered. But it's a lifestyle decision. You'll make your real profit when you sell."

## Size Matters

The more guest rooms you have, the more gross income you'll earn. Which makes sense—two rooms at \$100 each is \$200 per day while ten rooms at the same rate at full occupancy brings in \$1,000 per day. Which is great. But it also follows that the more rooms you have, the more expenses and the more work you have as well.

Also note that we've used the term "at full occupancy." No innkeeper, from the most budget-priced mom-and-pop Cheap Sleep Motel to the ritziest five-star

Waldorf Hotel, expects year-round total occupancy unless a series of major conventions, the Olympic Games, and a royal coronation are all occurring in town on each other's figurative heels.

### **As The Snow Melts**

However, it doesn't all have to be doom and gloom. Not all bed and breakfast locations are seasonal ones. And even if yours falls into that category, there are things you can do to generate off-season traffic. Chapter 11 explores these in-depth, including inventing reasons for guests to visit other than beachcombing or skiing. The seaside B&B might host a Victorian Christmas weekend to bring those summer people in during winter, for example, while the ski resort B&B might feature a Murder Among the Pines mystery weekend to attract tourists during summer.

### **Building A Reputation**

Yet another factor that will influence your occupancy rates and therefore your room revenues is the length of time you're in business. It takes time to build a reputation and a clientele, and you may not see significant revenues for three to five years. This is not true for every B&B, of course; if you locate in an area where demand for lodging outstrips the available choices, your earnings may be high from the outset. And if you choose to purchase an existing bed and breakfast with a good customer base, you can expect higher revenues in your first few years.

The final element in determining your earnings is how hard to you want to work at your business. If you choose to take in guests only seasonally or on alternate weekends, you'll earn less than if you're busily catering to customers 365 days a year.

So, bottom line, what can you expect to earn as a bed and breakfast owner? According to PAII, net income, determined after all business expenses have been deducted, can range from less than \$10,000 per year for the small B&B with one to four guest rooms to \$80,000-plus for an establishment with nine to 12 guest rooms.

### **STARTUP BREAD**

No matter what your profit potential is, you won't have any earnings to count until your B&B is ready to take in guests. And getting up and running takes capital. While you can make do with the extra set of Little Mermaid sheets from your daughter's trundle bed for visiting family and friends, you'll need to buy brand-

### **Fun Fact**

*The year 1933 was a bad one for lodging; hotels experienced their lowest-ever occupancy rate of 51 percent, says the American Hotel & Motel Association. And in 1946, with everyone home from the war, the lodging industry had its best-ever occupancy rate of 93 percent.*



new bedding for your B&B guests, along with new mattresses, pillows, towels, and more. And even if you'll run your operation from your existing home instead of buying a fixer, local laws may require you to install new kitchen equipment or fixtures,

upgrade your pool to public standards or add fire safety fixtures.

Just how much you'll spend will depend, again, on your particular bed and breakfast. Obviously, the fewer guest rooms you have, the fewer mattresses, pillows, towels, and the like you'll have to buy. Also obviously, you'll spend far less updating your existing home with plenty of guest rooms than if you buy a dilapidated relic that was condemned 20 years earlier.

But while it's impossible to put a price tag on the property you'll transform into an inn, it is possible to ball-

park renovation and furnishing costs. A good rule of thumb is \$35,000 to \$50,000 per guest room for larger properties and \$20,000 to \$40,000 for very small or low-cost operations, according to the PAII.

### Fun Fact

**Inns tend to set up shop in areas that run-of-the-mill hotels don't find financially feasible, according to the Professional Association of Innkeepers International: 52 percent in small resort villages, 29 percent in rural areas, 16 percent in urban areas, and 3 percent in suburbia.**



## HOST WITH THE MOST

Perhaps the most important element to factor in when deciding whether you really want to start a B&B—aside from startup costs—is whether you've got the personality for the job. Since innkeepers make their work look effortless, most people assume it really is. They imagine a cozy, laid-back lifestyle of greeting guests, chatting before a crackling hearth, and graciously accepting compliments on stupendously prepared gourmet breakfasts.

The reality is getting up every single morning at dawn or earlier to prepare the morning meal, even if you were up all night with a sick child, you have a sinus headache from hell, the regional B&B inspector will be arriving at 10 a.m., and the bank loan officer is expecting an occupancy rate schedule by 11 a.m. Then you've got to serve that breakfast cheerfully and unhurriedly (no yanking plates out from under guests' forks before they're finished) while answering questions about which local sights to take in and how to reach them.

Then there are the dishes to wash, the kitchen to clean, the guest rooms to clean, and laundry to do at the same time you're weeding the garden, taking reservations for next summer, unclogging the toilet in the Scarlett Room's bathroom, and writing advertising copy for the Christmas issues of several magazines. And don't for-

get about the sick child, the B&B inspector, and the bank!

### **Multitask Master**

Innkeeping requires that you be a master of multitasking. It's true that you need to be a people person, one who loves meeting, greeting, and entertaining guests. But you also need to be a front desk clerk, reservations agent, maintenance person, chef, butler, bookkeeper, scullery maid, sales and marketing manager, and housekeeper. And have a life, too.

If you're a person who likes to stick to one job, do it well for eight hours a day, then go home and leave your work behind, innkeeping is not for you. Sure, a 9-to-5 job is often a drag, but you have the bliss of being able to shut off the lights at the end of the day and call it quits. With a bed and breakfast, you're living "at the office" 24/7, and although you'll have your own private quarters away from the guests, there's no real getting away as long as you're on-site.

"It's really hard work," says Nancy Sandstrom, who with husband Steve runs

### **Fun Fact**

*Americans are on a weekend getaway whirlwind, says the Travel Industry Association of America. Thirty-five percent of all domestic travel is one to two night stays. That's 225 million trips. Continued gas price increases may have an impact, but the chances are greater that people will use a short stay at a bed & breakfast not far from home to satisfy their mini-vacation needs!*



## **The Moderate Squad**

**Two important elements to consider when deciding whether the B&B** business is right for you are its risk and stability factors. Unless you're specifically seeking a money pit to use as a tax shelter (a ploy that doesn't really work anyway), you don't want to pour your heart, soul, and bank account into a venture that's a volatile high risk.

This is not the case with the bed and breakfast. Both risk and stability factors register in the moderate range for this industry. There's an element of uncertainty in starting any new business, but the B&B is considered a stable industry. And since more and more travelers, from honeymooners and businesspeople to seniors, are discovering the delights of bed and breakfast stays every year, the trend seems to be on an upswing and not likely to slow. And that makes the B&B a steady growth opportunity.

### Smart Tip

**Make sure you've stayed in B&Bs—** not a large country inn but a smaller operation—before you take on one of your own, advises Michelle Souza of Nutmeg Bed & Breakfast Agency. “How do you know you’re going to like it as an owner if you’ve never stayed in one as a guest?”



a six-room B&B in Bayfield, Wisconsin. “In the busy season, you put in 18- to 20-hour days. You’re on call all the time.”

“Step back and think about the impact on your personal life,” warns Michelle Souza of Nutmeg Bed & Breakfast Agency. “This is not a business you can separate from your personal life. And most of it happens on weekends.”

“Being an innkeeper is like being a hostess getting ready to have a party every day,” says Nancy Helsper, who with husband Charles, runs a 12-room

inn in San Diego. “You have to clean the house, prepare the food, and prepare the linens.” And be emotionally up. Nobody wants a host who’s dragging or cranky.

If you love being on the go all the time, accomplishing several tasks at once—even on 50 consecutive weekends—and creatively meeting new challenges while also carrying on cheerfully at drudge work, then you’ll be in your element as a B&B host.

### All Inn The Family

But there’s still more to being a bed and breakfast innkeeper. You’ll have guests in your home at all times. And while you may (or may not) get away with Pokémon cards strewn across the living room, a layer of dust on the dining room table, and various assortments of dirty laundry lining the hallway when Mom comes to visit, you can’t do so with paying guests. They’ll expect to see a charming, clean, and tidy showplace at all times. So if you—and your family—are more into sailing along through a sea of stuff than in keeping things shipshape, you’ll have a tough time with a B&B.

Which brings us to a very important point. Unless you’re a single person who’ll be sole owner and the only permanent resident of your bed and breakfast, you’ll need to consider the personalities of your significant other or spouse and family as well as your own. Living in a B&B is the same as having nonstop house guests; it means you have to give up a certain amount of privacy. You can’t wander around in your skivvies any time you like or sweat along with that step aerobics video in the den. And unless you’re careful to confine all conversation to your private quarters, everything from planning sessions on planting the garden to heated discussions on whether your daughter is allowed to get her nose pierced, may be staged in front of complete strangers.

If your family is basically friendly, cheerful, and outgoing, they’ll enjoy the

interaction with guests as much as you will. But if they're not social butterflies, or simply are uncomfortable with the idea of sharing their home with strangers, you may find yourself in deep and difficult waters. While most B&B families have a ball in the business, some innkeepers found that it made their families so unhappy they had to give it up.

### **INDUSTRY NIGHTMARES**

Besides keeping track of everything from chocolates on pillows at bedtime to fresh flowers in the dining room to which guests are allergic to eggs, innkeeping demands that you also be extremely organized and detail-oriented.

If you're a cheerful but scattered type who trusts that book work will take care of itself, you'll soon find yourself in one of the hospitality industry's nightmares: having overbooked by reserving the same room for two (or more) sets of guests at the same time. Or forgetting that the Smythes never sent in their deposit to hold their room during the biggest holiday weekend of the year. Which means that they never show up and neither does anyone else because you held the room for the Smythes.

You also must be able to keep a stern and steady watch on your supplies and your bookkeeping. Your guests won't be impressed if you run out of toilet paper, forget to buy eggs for next morning's meal, or don't have clean sheets because you overlooked paying the laundry service.

#### **Smart Tip**

*"There are two parts to being a successful host," says Nancy Helsper, co-owner of a Queen Anne mansion B&B in San Diego. "There's innkeeping—being a concierge and hostess—and there's the business side: taxes, payroll, and marketing."*



### **THE RIGHT STUFF**

The people we interviewed for this book come from a variety of backgrounds. Two are long-timers in the hospitality business, one is a TV executive and another is retired military. What they all have in common is the right stuff—an ability to combine the skills and enthusiasm they acquired in other careers and apply them to the formidable—but fun—task of running a bed and breakfast.

### **Love At First Site**

David and Marilyn Lewis, of Fort Worth, Texas, didn't start out with the idea of running a bed and breakfast. Two years ago, they were cruising neighborhoods, looking for a house to remodel, when they came across the 1893 mansion that's now their inn. "It had been vacant for 12 years and was sitting here crumbling,"

## The Inside Story

**Surf through the Professional Association of Innkeepers International's** web pages or the pages of B&B publications, and you'll find lots of training programs, workshops, and seminars. Some are weekend workshops that deal with specific issues like marketing; others are complete hands-on week-long sessions that let you take the host driver's seat and learn innkeeping on-the-job.

Take a course or two before you purchase your property or start renovations. You'll handle everything from reservations and greeting guests to preparing rooms and meals. It's a good way to discover what innkeeping really entails and find out whether you've got what it takes—and whether you'll like it.

Marilyn says. But the couple saw through the neglect to the beauty beneath—it was love at first sight and seemed to provide a serendipitous way to put their talents, and the house, to work as a B&B.

"Everything we've done in our lives prepared us to do this," Marilyn, an interior decorator, explains. "We like people. I like to cook and decorate and entertain. It was all just natural." But it's also a lot of work. "Nobody should ever do a B&B if they think it's easy," Marilyn says.

The couple moved in, setting up housekeeping in an apartment at the back of the main house—although the term "apartment" could be used loosely. "It had no plumbing or anything," Marilyn recalls. "We moved in and thought, 'This is a money pit. How are we going to pull this off?'"

Pull it off they did—with resounding success. David, an executive with a Christian cable TV network and an ordained minister, and Marilyn decided to use love and romance as their theme. First they remodeled the carriage house, turning it from what Marilyn calls "one step up from homeless" into two hearts-and-flowers suites. The Beloved Cottage was up and running in just eight months, and the Sweetheart Cottage followed six weeks later. "We put up our website," Marilyn says, "and another bed and breakfast in town (there are only about five) sent us their overflow."

Besides the main house and cottages, the inn also includes four corporate apartments in two duplexes across the street. The couple's daughter lives in one unit; the others fill with corporate people in midrelocation or traveling, and also act as overflow for the cottages on weekends. There's still a long way to go. The main house, which will have four guest rooms, was still in the throes of major renovation when we interviewed the couple.

But with romance as its theme, in just 18 months in business, the inn has hosted 91 honeymoon couples, David says proudly, along with about 150 anniversary couples and many birthdays and getaways.

## Twenty Reasons Why

Like David and Marilyn, Nancy and Steve Sandstrom of Bayfield, Wisconsin, fell in love with their house and knew they had to have it. Unlike their Texas counterparts, however, the Midwest couple had already decided to open a bed and breakfast. They just hadn't decided where or when. "Steve was part-owner of a family printing company," Nancy says. "I had 15 years [of experience] as an executive director and marketing director for nonprofit corporations. It was empty nest time, with one child in college and one about to be. We'd had enough of corporate life; we were emotionally and psychologically ready."

The couple had been conducting market research for three years—and taking their time about taking the plunge—when Nancy ran into old friend Jerry Phillips of PAII at the association's 1995 annual conference. Jerry, who owns an inn nearby, told Nancy the house that's now her B&B was for sale. "I gave him 20 reasons why buying it was a bad idea," Nancy recalls, "and finished up with, 'How much do they want for it?'" She then called husband Steve, and they decided to go for it.

And with good reason. The 1885 sandstone house, nestled in the woods along Pikes Creek and with views of Lake Superior, had been in Nancy's family from 1905 until it was sold in 1994 to a couple who turned it into a two-room B&B. It's three miles south of Bayfield, a quaint lakeshore community that's a destination resort for the region. "It's one of the most beautiful places in the Midwest," Nancy says contentedly. "I've spent every summer of my life here."

The house had been in operation as a B&B for years, but without much success. The old owner had kept no financial records to help guide Steve and Nancy, and the house itself needed lots of TLC. "When we bought the property it was in terrible shape," Nancy explains. "Structurally it was OK, but mechanically and cosmetically it needed a lot."

Six years and a lot of hard work later, the house gleams with the patina of care and attention—to the delight of its many guests. Nancy ran the inn by herself for the first two and a half years, while Steve wound down his career in the city. He still works full time away from the B&B but much closer to home, so he can share in the innkeeping duties (and pleasures).

Steve and Nancy expanded the B&B from the four guest rooms it had when they purchased it in 1996 to five guest rooms and a third-floor suite. With relaxation and the great outdoors as their keywords for guests, they're booked solid all summer season as well as during winter's blustery weather.

### Stat Fact

**What are the most popular travel times for Americans?**

*Summer, fall, and spring, with winter being the least popular says the Travel Industry Association of America.*



### Air Force To Farmhouse

Bill and Sandra Wayne began looking into the B&B business in 1982 (“seriously in 1984,” Bill says), and when he retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1986, the couple started in on Sandra’s 80-acre ancestral farm, which they had acquired five years earlier. “The farm was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994 as the John A. Adams Farmstead Historic District because of pioneering soil conservation practices by Sandra’s great-grandfather,” Bill says.

Located seven miles from Warrensburg, Missouri—about an hour southeast of Kansas City—the B&B encompasses two separate buildings. “The 1867 Farmhouse suite includes five rooms of the original farmhouse,” Bill explains. “The Cottage on the Knoll is a secluded, romantic cottage with a whirlpool tub, fireplace, and king bed. We live in a 700-square-foot addition to the farmhouse—three rooms, plus a laundry area for the two of us.”

Transforming the property into the family and romance-themed B&B it is today took hard work as well as imagination. “From 1986 to 1988, we renovated

the farmhouse by adding a modern addition for our quarters and to provide a place for HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning), indoor plumbing, and the like,” Bill says. “The architecture in a 120-year old house limited what we could do, so we started with two rooms with a shared bath.”

The couple later changed their marketing strategy to make the two rooms into a suite that’s perfect for families and other groups. “In 1998,

we built the cottage to our own design,” Bill adds. With horses and barn swallows in the old barns—in constant use since the 1870s—and wild turkeys and deer roaming around outside, the B&B offers guests the best of country pleasures and city amenities.

#### Smart Tip

*A well-honed sense of humor is an important part of the innkeeper’s arsenal. If you can’t laugh when the inevitable predicaments occur, you won’t last long.*



### Seaside Seasons

Halfway across the country, on northwest Florida’s Emerald Coast, Bruce and Judy Albert are celebrating their inn’s 13th year in business—it opened in 1990. “We have been in the hospitality business most of our lives,” Bruce and Judy say.

And it shows in their choice of location for the Georgian plantation-style B&B. “The inn is located less than a one-block walk to the Gulf of Mexico and just a few steps to the town center of Seaside,” the couple explains. “This was the filming location for the movie, “The Truman Show,” starring Jim Carrey. During the sea-

son—all spring, summer, and fall—there are movies in the park, storytellers, wine festivals, ballets on stage in the Lyceum, classical, country, jazz, easy-listening, and rock 'n' roll concerts.

“The inn has seven rooms, each with private bath, wet bar, TV, VCR, telephone, clock-radio, and fireplace, and two suites with private baths, living rooms, and butler’s kitchens,” the innkeepers say. The same amenities, from TV to fireplace, are provided in the larger settings as well.

“Our living quarters are off-premises,” Bruce and Judy say. “We live on a farm where we grow pesticide-free vegetables, edible flowers, herbs and fruits, which we bring to the inn as often as possible for the breakfasts and dinners we serve.”

Although the bed and breakfast looks as if it’s been a regal member of its seaside community for more than a century, it was built a mere 13 years ago—and acts as a showcase for Bruce and Judy’s considerable talents. “We serve breakfast every morning in our cozy 18-seat dining room,” the couple says. “We are open for lunch and dinner on a seasonal basis. We are the host year-round for many bridal showers and weddings.”

With its Southern charm and stunning Emerald Coast location, the inn is sure to do well into the next century—and beyond.

### Kismet

A world away in San Diego, Nancy and Charles Helsper, married just one year, were looking for an antique four-poster bed and found instead an entire bed and breakfast inn. And like David and Marilyn in Fort Worth, they fell instantly in love with the place. Nancy was working as assistant director of catering at the San Diego Hilton, and Charles was safely ensconced in his second career—after the Navy—with General Dynamics. The couple had taken a PAII aspiring innkeeper course with the idea of moving back East and opening a B&B when they retired. But that was years in the future—they thought.

Then came the phone call. “A friend called and said she’d read in the paper that a bed and breakfast in Old Town San Diego was being liquidated and holding an estate sale,” Nancy recalls. “It was only five blocks from our home, and we didn’t even know it was a B&B.”

Nancy and Charles went to take a

### Fun Fact

*The pancake—that staple of the American hot breakfast—first came into being many centuries ago in England and is still a Shrove Tuesday tradition in that country. Cooks looking ahead to Lent, when dairy products were prohibited, used their stores of butter, eggs, and milk to make, and then merrily eat, pancakes by the score.*



look at the furniture, saw the Queen Anne mansion and decided then and there to buy it. It was kismet! But the owner insisted the house was in bankruptcy and couldn't be sold. Nancy and Charles, however, were determined. They called the owner in the middle of the night and persuaded her to negotiate a sale, a complicated procedure because the building was on a lease from the county.

"We purchased the lease," Nancy says. "But we had to purchase all the furnishings as well, and they'd already been advertised." Which meant they had to let in the public. "The owner gave me a five-minute start before she opened the doors. I ran around and wrote 'Sold' on everything."

The same morning—as so often happens when fate decides to lend a helping hand—Nancy was promoted to director of catering, a position for which she'd worked long and hard. Even though she was now an innkeeper, Nancy felt she couldn't turn down the promotion. So she and Charles worked full time at outside jobs and ran the inn, with the assistance of the manager they'd inherited with the property.

The couple decided to keep their home. "We had a dog, and Charles wanted us to have our own space," Nancy says. So when Charles got laid off less than three months later and Nancy had left her job, they were suddenly down from two and a half incomes (the half being the Navy pension) to just one-half, and two mortgages.

A giant gulp. But Charles and Nancy made it work. They transformed the inn into a showplace for business as well as leisure travelers with private baths for each room (initially baths were shared) and phones in all rooms. They purchased the Italianate villa next door. And they both worked at the inn until they could afford staff.

All the long hours and financial investment paid off. Now with 12 guest rooms or suites, the inn has just celebrated its ninth anniversary and boasts an enviable 80 to 85 percent occupancy rate year-round.

## BREAKFAST FORECAST

After you've considered startup costs, potential profits, and whether you've got the moxie for the job, one final issue to consider is the forecast for the bed and breakfast industry. Is the B&B concept a fad or a form of lodging that's here to stay?

The forecast is excellent. Bed and breakfast is in a steady growth stage, predicts

### Fun Fact

**WHOA there! Wyoming Homestay**  
*And Outdoor Adventures (WHOA) is a statewide organization of B&Bs, lodges, and working cattle ranches that take guests. Find a bed and breakfast association in your state by contacting the Professional Association of Innkeepers International.*



PAII. Twenty-five percent of guests are first-timers to B&Bs, a figure that indicates there's a still large market out there to be tapped. Innkeepers are adding guest rooms because they have a need for them rather than in a desperate ploy to increase revenues. They are also upgrading existing rooms to meet guests' needs, not merely because of perceived trends. The bed

and breakfast industry tends to be recession-proof. In a down economy, travelers may not be able to swing the price tag of a European vacation or Caribbean cruise. But the B&B that's perhaps no more than two to four hours from home is still an affordable luxury, and therefore more of a buy than ever in a down economy. In an up economy, the bed and breakfast's deluxe amenities and personal pampering keep it a desirable lodging destination.

All of which makes the B&B the way to go for the entrepreneur who wants the joy and fascination of meeting new people and the satisfaction of making folks feel pampered while working at home in a challenging environment.

So let's get started! Pop those cinnamon rolls in the oven, pour yourself a fresh cup of java, and get going with "B&B 101."

### ***Fun Fact***

***In the 1993 comedy flick, "Groundhog Day," Bill Murray and Andie McDowell stay in a bed and breakfast—over and over and over again.***

