

PHOTOGRAPHS: MEG MCKINNEY

## A Sweet Stay

Wonderful food and comfy surroundings indulge guests at this bed-and-breakfast in southeast Kentucky

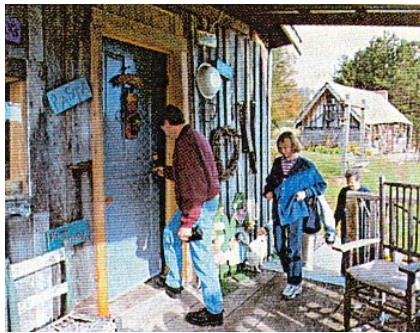
My only regret is that I didn't ask Vesta for her apple cake recipe. I still have dreams about that cake, topped with a caramel icing that brought tears of joy to this sugarholic's eyes. But that is absolutely my only lament about staying at the Apple Tree Inn.

I have Vesta Davis's husband, Jack, to thank for the inn's very existence. "I bought it because I needed the driveway, he said. Jack's business in Barbourville, Kentucky (just miles off I-75), adjoined the house, and he needed easy access. "I told Vesta she could have it or bulldoze it."

Thankfully, Vesta was not in a bulldozing frame of mind. So she and Jack took the 1907 Colonial Victorian and restored it to a genteel beauty, filling it with the amenities about which most weary travelers only dream.

"My pet peeve has always been not having a good shower," said Vesta. "I want really hot water and good water pressure." A full-body steam shower in the downstairs bathroom fills that need and then some.

Jack insisted on comfortable mattresses and pillows, something he always longed for and didn't find in most hotel rooms. Guests luck out in



this area, too, with feather pillows and a mattress guaranteed to send you into a Rip van Winkle-style sleep filled with sweet dreams. Literally.

Before I went to bed, I spied a cake on the stove that would surely bust those Atkins diets. "That's my apple cake," said Vesta. "Just in case you get hungry in the middle of the night." I decided not to wait that long. The caramel icing was still warm, and I thought perhaps I should never leave this happy place.

I awoke the next morning to the universally yummy smells of bacon and coffee. Vesta was making French toast, and she didn't say a word about the giant hunk of apple cake missing from the pan. After a thorough pummeling by the incredible shower, I ate possibly the best breakfast I have ever had.

When I bragged endlessly on the Food, Vesta said, "Oh, but you've still got to try our fine downtown restaurant, The Vintage House."

So after a day of shopping for handmade items in Kentucky Communities Crafts, I strolled over to what used to be a hardware store and walked

above, left: Vesta Davis won't let you leave her Apple Tree Inn hungry. Her full breakfast will fortify you for pretty much anything. left: Browse the Kentucky-made crafts selection, which includes weaving, quilting, candles, pottery, and woodwork, in Barbourville.

into another culinary delight.

Owner and chef Doug Warriner once had a difficult time convincing some food service folks to drive all the way to Barbourville for his Vintage House Restaurant. "I used to rendezvous with the seafood man halfway to Lexington," said Doug. "We'd meet up at an abandoned service station so I could buy fresh seafood."

Those days are long gone; Doug and wife Sharon's restaurant is well known for its fine dining and wonderful atmosphere. I loved the fried green tomatoes, and the buttermilk-pecan chicken had a perfect, tangy crunch. I did save room for the creme brulee, though I felt disloyal to Vesta's apple cake, which I knew would be waiting for me back at the Apple Tree Inn.

But that's okay. By midnight, there was room for one more piece of caramel-topped perfection. My dreams have never been sweeter.

WANDA MCKINNEY

**Apple Tree Inn:** 231 Knox Street, Barbourville, KY 40906; (606) 546-5328. **Rates: start at \$87 per night.** Reservation required. **The Vintage House Restaurant:** 101 North Main Street; (606) 546-5414. **Entrées:** start at \$12. \*