



Interview with Esther Kauffeld-Hoffa
Garden and Galley
Bed & Breakfast
Indianola, Iowa



INNterview by Amelia Painter

Esther Kauffeld-Hoffa first began dreaming of becoming an innkeeper over 22 years ago, and while she has had a taste of fulfilling this dream, she may soon be taking her pursuits to the next level.

Not quite two years ago, Hoffa purchased a home, renovated it, and opened it as a bed and breakfast. But, zoning problems and the realization that her dreams couldn't completely unfold with the property prompted her to take another risk and purchase the inn previously known as the Gallery and Galley in Indianola, Iowa.

Unpacked boxes in one corner was a sign of her temporary shuttle between the home she just left and the inn she closed until her husband could get them completely moved into their new living quarters at the, now renamed inn, Garden and Galley. However, the hassle of moving clearly didn't diminish her sense of humor or her zest for the challenge before her.

Amelia Painter: When did you decide to become an innkeeper?

Esther Kauffeld-Hoffa: The very first time I stayed in a bed and breakfast inn, 22 years ago in Galena, Illinois, I knew this was for me! Then, less than two years ago the house next door went on the market. A good friend suggested that I buy it and have my bed and breakfast there. To get the place up and running, it took six months of hard labor from my wonderful husband and me. This is how my dream came true.

AP: Did you train for this type of work, or take classes?

EKH: I think I was raised to do this. My family was a group of foodies and oenophiles. My mom included me in her kitchen full of delicious food activity. We entertained frequently and I was raised to graciously wait on people. We always had wine at all the big meals. I did take one cooking class, but cooking is in my blood – plus I LOVE to eat!

AP: I know you are a new innkeeper with less than two years experience, but here you are opening your second inn. Can you tell me what prompted you to sell one

and buy another?

EKH: My first inn, The Bungalow On C, was a perfect place for me to start innkeeping. Having it next door was a good balance for me and my husband. However, when this acreage came on the market in February of 2005, it was apparent to us that this was where we needed to bring the bed and breakfast. This new location has wonderfully private living quarters for my husband Dan to escape to when needed. Here I will be able to host weddings, luncheons, teas – the sky is the limit. It also has almost nine beautiful acres of rolling Iowa country side to explore with views of the South River Valley for my guests to enjoy. I have about 8 to 10 apple trees that we will work on to revitalize next spring, and I can see lots of apple dishes in the future for my guests, including apple butter. I also hope to add some other fruit trees, especially cherry!

AP: Your inn has a comfortable, yet very organic feel to it. It's almost as if Frank Lloyd Wright had come for dinner and stayed over to help you decorate.



Have you had training as an interior decorator or taken any classes focused on Wright's views on architectural space or ornamentation?

EKH: I have had a love affair with Wright's style of design for years. Prairie style is perfect for the prairies of Iowa! I just love to decorate homes, I guess that's in my blood too. Not much makes me happier than when I have a paint brush in my hand and I'm working away at redecorating. I do read lots of magazines, and I watch the make over TV shows when possible.

AP: No training or interior design classes? How about art classes?

EKH: No training at all – just a huge love of design and houses plus lots of hours of magazine research.

AP: Your inn's rooms have a rich, textured feel to them, almost as if you had layered the fabrics – simplified designs that are more traditional, but not boring. Can you give our readers a few guidelines on how to achieve this type of consistent design?

EKH: I get a picture in my mind of how I want the room to look and to feel when completed. I can clearly see it in my head. I'm funny that way. I probably should have been an interior designer instead of a speech therapist! I keep the image of what I want the room to look like in mind whenever I'm out shopping. So I'm really always looking for the right stuff to complete the look. I look everywhere: stores, garage sales and thrift stores. I never know where the perfect touches will be found. I pick themes for all my rooms. This really helps narrow my



search, plus it really helps me get my mental picture. I also never really finish a room; something better might crop up, and so then that goes in.

AP: What is your husband's role?

EKH: My wonderfully supportive husband Dan (a MUST for this occupation, in my opinion) is in charge of a never ending "honey do" list. He is my right hand for keeping the physical plant going, and he does the major yard work. He likes to stay in the background most of the time, but he is great with the guests.

AP: Do you have any children? Do they have a role at the B&B?

EKH: Dan and I have one daughter who is in college in Florida. When Rhiannon is home, though, she pitches right in. She often is called upon to help get rooms ready, plus she loves to cook and to meet the guests. My dream is that one day she would take over this place. I'd like to keep this nine acres of God's green acres in our family and continue to share it with others. Tradition!

AP: This brings me to my last question. Would you like to share a few tips to new or aspiring innkeepers to help them avoid any problems you may have encountered in your first year as an innkeeper?

EKH: My biggest suggestion to aspiring innkeepers is to seek out a state bed & breakfast organization. It is tough to go it all alone. I did check out and hook up with the Iowa Bed & Breakfast Innkeepers Association (IBBIA) pretty quickly when I started out, and I know that got me through some tough times.

Get a mentor – someone else who is, or has been, a successful innkeeper who is willing to share with you and to listen to you. IBBIA is now working on doing a mentoring program for its new and aspiring innkeepers. I know this will be most valuable to those just starting out. Visit lots of inns, ask questions, questions, and read innkeeping journals like this one. If you love to take care of guests, share with others and help people have a fun relaxing time in your home, this may be the right industry for you. Check it out by attending a state bed & breakfast conference in your area. You just might get hooked for life. I know I did!

Also, be sure to get a good webmaster – especially one who knows the B&B industry. This person or business can be found through a state association or the Professional Association of Innkeepers International (www.paii.com). And, when you do your web site, hire a professional photographer; it is worth the money spent, since more than 90% of your business will come from your web site. Money well spent! I've used the same photographer and the same web designer for both of my sites, and I've had amazing results.

AP: Well, thank you. This has been a real pleasure.

EKH: Thank you.

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