

Union Street Inn a Travel Channel “Top 10 Bed-and-Breakfast”

B&B combines
historic charm,
modern convenience

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Ken and Deb Withrow are no strangers to the hospitality world, but both would admit that they weren't really sure what to expect when they took over the Union Street Inn in 1995.

Ken was the general manager of The Royalton in New York City for hotelier and developer Ian Schrager, and Deb was the display manager for Henri Bendel and Fiorucci in New York, but neither had experience running a small-town B&B.

“I had never done a resort. All my experience had been in big-city hotels,” Ken said. “I said I know nothing about Nantucket, nothing about a resort and I don't know anybody. But we came here, and it became easy because people fall in love with Nantucket. We fell in love with Nantucket.”

The Withrows arrived to the island on a cold March day from Greenwich, Conn. and never looked back. Their son, Kevin, was five at the time and they moved into a 750-square-foot apartment just next door to the 12-room inn.

Recently, the inn was included in the Travel Channel's “Top 10 New England Bed-And-Breakfasts” for its four-poster beds, cozy sitting areas and fireplaces and being the only B&B in town to serve a full, hot breakfast.

“There's always something yummy cooking in the kitchen, such as stacks of fluffy blueberry pancakes or white-chocolate-chip cookies with macadamia nuts for a midafternoon snack,” the description reads.

For the first four years, Deb cooked breakfast herself. Guests can enjoy eggs any way they please, something that the Withrows recently started offering everyday because it was such a popular request. Hot specials rotate daily, and include an herb and cheese omelet with fresh dill and chives and served with bacon, a croissant and a side of fresh fruit salad; French toast made of challah bread served with fresh strawberries and blueberries and sausage; or eggs benedict, just to name a few.

Just over two years ago,



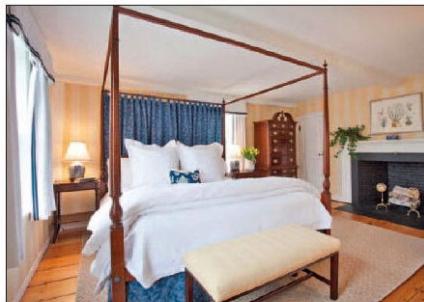
Photo by Nicole Harnishfeger

Deb and Ken Withrow in the Union Street Inn.



Courtesy of the Union Street Inn

The lobby of the 12-room Union Street Inn.



Courtesy of the Union Street Inn

One of the well-appointed rooms in the Union Street Inn.

the Withrows teamed up with New England interior designer Trudy Dujardin to transform the inn into a modern space while still respecting the bones of a 1770 whaling captain's house.

“We would never take away the beauty of this architecture from the whaling period,” Deb said.

Each guestroom features designer furniture, wallpaper, lighting, artwork and accessories, luxurious bedding with Frette linens and Matouk duvets, bathroom amenities by Malin+Goetz and flat-screen televisions. In addition, the furniture was reupholstered,

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new window treatments were installed and there are new floor coverings in each room.

Ken said that, aside from being blessed with a great physical product and location, it all comes down to service. This is why hiring has always been such a critical part of the Withrows' philosophy.

“Inns or any small hotel

under 50 rooms is a whole different animal,” Ken continued. “What we try to get our innkeepers to understand is from the time you walk in the door, within two minutes you should know where on the continuum does this couple fall? Are they B&B people? Do they talk people up, meet people and bond easily? Or are they all the way to the other spectrum hotel people?”

If a person has what Ken

calls “the hospitality gene,” then they will be able to answer that question within two minutes of a guest walking through the door. Creating those personal relationships with people is something that both Ken and Deb have grown to appreciate.

“We're more interested in doing something that blends the best of the hotel world with the best of the inn world,” Ken added.

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