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There are eight sides to this story

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"The house brought us here," says Deb Meritsky of Cleveland. Deb and her husband, Marc Rotman, purchased the T.M. Younglove Octagon House in Hammondsport and transformed it into the Black Sheep Inn.

The T.M. Younglove house is one of a handful of octagon structures remaining in the Finger Lakes region and the only one in Steuben County. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The "Octagon Mode" flourished for only a few decades in the mid-19th century and no more than 800 structures still exist in the United States. (See sidebar story on octagon houses, Page 10D).

The history of the house began in Pleasant Valley in 1807 when the Cornelius Younglove family became one of the first families to establish a permanent home in the area — some of the land originally developed by the Youngloves is still held by the family's descendants.

Cornelius' son Timothy M. Younglove constructed the octagon home in 1859, attending to many of the menial tasks personally. Fifteen years earlier, as a trustee, he had participated in the decision to construct an octagonal schoolhouse in Hammondsport. In 1860, T.M. Younglove became one of the founders of the Pleasant Valley Wine Company and the recipient of New York state's first winery license.

For more than 100 years, the T.M. Younglove Octagon House remained in the family. Two rectangular wings were added in 1882. In the early 1960s, the house was converted to a two-family rental and sold. Over the past 40 years, it was home to several families and dozens of renters — until it was discovered six years ago by the couple from Cleveland.

The restoration of the historic octagon house, and the creation of the Black Sheep Inn, have been the culmination of lifelong dreams for Marc and Deb.

Marc, a graduate of Kent State University's Interior Design program, has spent more than 18 years in the design trade, primarily involved with sales of high-end residential furnishings and finishes. Deb is a graduate of the New England Culinary Institute. A classically trained chef, she has more than 20 years' experience in food service, restaurants and sales. The two combined their considerable skills and experience in developing the project, but it took them six years to complete.

During that time, they maintained a home and professional interests in Cleveland, Deb explains. "Sometimes we could come here together and work; other times we tag-teamed." Deb moved into the inn full time last summer, when it officially opened; Marc is selling the home in Cleveland and will soon join her and the two cats in Hammondsport.

Marc and Deb did the demolition work themselves — a project that took them a year. Then they called in local tradesmen to restore the interior. When the restoration was complete, the couple did all the painting and finishing themselves. They chose paints, wall coverings, furnishings, fixtures and accessories appropriate to the pre-Victorian period of the home.

"There wasn't as much ornamentation then," Deb points out. Classical simplicity was preferred. Marc has great color sense, and the palette for the Black Sheep Inn reflects his expertise. Among the intriguing colors used for the guest rooms (primarily from Benjamin Moore's "historic" collection) are "Great Barrington Green," "Yorkshire Tan," "Van Courtland Blue," "Chippendale Rosetone" and "Bradstreet Beige." Each guest room has a private bathroom, and these have coordinating wallpapers, primarily from Thibaut. Floors are painted, also typical for the period, in "Ashley Gray."

Each guest room has name. The Younglove Room is named for Timothy Younglove, first owner and builder of the house. The Wood Room is named for neighbors Paul and Elise Wood — Paul is the great-great-grandson of Timothy Younglove and occupied this room in his youth. Although Taylor is a grand old name in Finger Lakes wine county, the Taylor suite actually honors Deb's mother — some of her antiques are here. The Pleasant Valley Room is named for the picturesque valley in which the Black Sheep Inn is located.

A number of innkeeper friends informed Deb and Marc that they absolutely had to have a blue room. Although they had not originally planned on having that color, they decided to use blue in the Curtiss Room, named for aviation pioneer and inventor Glenn H. Curtiss, a Hammondsport native. And, as their friends predicted, this room has become the favorite with guests. The blue walls represent sea and sky; the decor conveys a spirit of invention.

Public spaces on the first floor have natural wood floors. The living room is dramatic with "Mink Violet" walls and white woodwork. The mirror over the marble fireplace is flanked by striking sconces, which were a \$1 gag gift to Deb at a birthday party. She and Marc refinished and wired the sconces, and they now light the area perfectly.

The wallpaper above the white wainscoting in the dining room dictated the color scheme of the downstairs, Deb says. Pastoral farm scenes are portrayed in greens, golds, browns and deep earthy reds on a parchment background. Twin wrought-iron chandeliers hang over the drop-leaf tables where guests are served breakfast. In summer months, breakfast may be enjoyed outdoors on the landscaped stone terrace.

The den, with deep brown walls, was originally a billiard room. Marc and Deb hope to track down the original billiard table and bring it home. This room is sometimes used by corporate guests as a meeting room.

Deb's lively kitchen is painted "Pumpkin Spice" and "Terra Mauve." Shelves, cabinets and counters are piled with ingredients in glass jars, spices and condiments, utensils and collectible cookware. There are two side-by-side ranges where the chef works her magic.

Guests at the Black Sheep Inn may arrange to have Deb cook dinner for them — three to seven courses! — and they are invited to watch her at work. Their kibitzing doesn't faze her: Deb recalls that she kicked her mother out of the kitchen when she was 8 and cooked her first big dinner party at 13. She plans to organize cooking classes at the inn.

Deb also offers to pack custom picnic baskets for guests as well as box lunches, particularly for those embarking on all-day tours of the wineries. "They'll feel better when they get back if they eat well on the way," Deb says.

Plans for the coming season include landscaping and planting an extensive vegetable garden. Reservations are already coming in, and some special occasions and several weddings have been booked for the inn as well.

The inn offers special packages which change with the seasons. Currently, guests can choose from options including a Romance package with horse-drawn carriage, long-stemmed roses and a couples' spa treatment. The Finger Lakes Fiber Tour is for crafters who can work on a project with a local fiber artist; an Herbal Remedies package lets guests create their own concoctions at the Healing Spirits herb farm. There's even a special package for chocoholics.

For more information about the Black Sheep Inn, visit [www.stayblacksheepinn.com](http://www.stayblacksheepinn.com) or call the inn at (607) 569-3767 (toll free (877) 274-6386).

Martha Horton is a freelance writer. If your home has a distinctive feature or significant history, call (607) 271-8253 to have your home featured in the Sunday Twin Tiers Homes section. Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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