

# THE

## Many of the world's scenic vistas

come with more than a few rooms with a view — Venice's Grand Canal, Paris's River Seine, California's Big Sur, Miami's South Beach — to list just a few. Why not Memphis's Mighty Mississippi?

Sure, some of Downtown's hotels come with river views from the upper floors. Not many lodging options, though, offer up-close Mississippi River views from 80 percent of the rooms in a location so close to the river that guests can walk to the water's edge just yards from the hotel's front door.

River Inn of Harbor Town is a 28-room boutique hotel that opened in October 2007 at Harbor Town, the unique New Urbanist community on Mud Island developed by Henry Turley and Jack Belz, the island's primary developers. The first — and only — hotel on the island, River Inn anchors the west end of Harbor Town Square, sitting on two tiny parcels of land split by a narrow street. The inn is owned by Turley; Lewis Holland, retired vice chairman of National Commerce Bancorp; Tom Scott, retired vice president of National Bank of Commerce; and Joe Weller, vice chairman and former CFO of Morgan Keegan.

"My partners and I were all interested in the hospitality business," Holland says. "This was the last undeveloped piece of land in Harbor Town. We looked at it with Henry Turley and said, 'Wouldn't this be a great place for a small hotel?' The setting with the river, the setting within the Harbor Town community itself, and it seemed to fit very closely with what we went into that endeavor wanting, what we would like to be associated with."

The award-winning hotel, which also features two restaurants — fine dining at Currents and a casual neighborhood grill at Tug's — was a \$9 million construction project that began in September 2006. The 28 rooms and suites, two restaurants, bar, and rooftop terrace occupy 32,000 square feet. The two buildings — one at four stories and the other at three — will be joined by a spa facility that will sit just to the west in an existing building.

The hotel looks like it belongs more in Europe's great metropolises and small villages, not America's 17th largest city. But that's the point, to a degree. Holland has traveled the world, picking up numerous ideas he thought he and his partners eventually would want to see in a Memphis hotel.



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—Karl Friedrich, General Manager

# RIVER'S INN

by Lance Allan Wiedower

"We all had spent many stays in small boutique hotels across the country and especially in Europe," he says. "We liked the feel, and Memphis did not offer this type of amenity. It's sort of an unparalleled situation. We also looked for something close to the geographic and cultural proximity of Memphis. Something river, something very traditional, something very old mixed in with modern conveniences."

European look and feel, yes, but Memphis is a historic city in its own right. As Holland puts it, Memphis is a Southern gem of a city in much the same way as New Orleans, Charleston, and Savannah. Those cities are filled with boutique hotels, bed and breakfasts, and historic inns, all with unique charm. Memphis, on the other hand, doesn't have many boutique hotels, particularly near the heart of Downtown. Holland believes River Inn will help Memphis join that club.

It starts with the type of amenities that make a hotel "boutique." Wine at check-in, luxurious bedding, designer bath amenities, fresh flowers, chocolate-covered strawberries, original artwork throughout, and a small number of rooms that make one-on-one attention possible.

"The number one thing that sets us apart is size," says Karl Friedrich, the hotel's general manager. "This is a true boutique hotel. With a smaller size, we can give more personalized service to our guests, such as turn-down service that includes complimentary port wine and truffles."

"We try to keep everything comfortable," Holland adds. "We don't fee people to death. Sparkling water in the rooms is complimentary; we don't charge a parking fee. Another thing that makes us different: I have never stayed at or seen a hotel in the U.S. that has flower boxes. That's something we picked up from Italy and France, just putting flower boxes outside the windows. And you can open the windows! You won't find a hotel where you can do that."

Friedrich, a native of Austria and trained in Bad Hofgastein, brings more than 30 years of hotel management experience to Harbor Town's premiere hotel. He has managed four-star and five-star hotels throughout the Caribbean, including Jamaica, Antigua, St. Maarten, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"Staying in small luxury places, most of them have great details," he says, referring to the numerous one-of-a-kinds and touches that fill River Inn. "We want features that go back to

the 1850s. The hardwood floors, for example, are from a textile business that was being torn down in Virginia. All these things give a place a soul. It gives it atmosphere."


Those heart-of-pine floorboards, found in the main lobby and elevator lobbies on every floor, were, indeed, cut from 1700s-era timbers that were support beams in a Virginia mill. The hotel also features gas lanterns by Bevola in New Orleans and brass mailboxes and marble countertops that were taken from Downtown's old Shrine Building. Tug's restaurant showcases river-themed art collected from the Memphis Public Library archives, and the river-themed art in the hotel lobby was created by area artists. Then there are the library-style sitting areas on each floor, a full complimentary gourmet breakfast, fitness center, and 24-hour concierge and valet services.

The inn's clientele is a mix of international visitors, business travelers, and tourists. A few are what Holland calls a "weekend contingent" — people from within a 150-mile radius of Memphis looking for a weekend getaway.

But area residents and Downtown patrons can also take advantage of the hotel, beginning with the restaurants. "That's really what we were interested in," says Holland. "A very nice hotel and a very first-class dining experience with one restaurant, and with the other restaurant, something casual yet very valuable to residents of the island and others Downtown."

"The hotel has been a true amenity to the population of Harbor Town," he continues. "If it's nice weather, area residents enjoy coming up to the rooftop and having a drink. During construction, no one could visualize how these two parcels could house something of

this magnitude, so there was a challenge architecturally to create a hotel on the limited land available and also create the mood and the culture we were interested in while blending it into Harbor Town. I think anyone you talk to will say they're pleased with the look and the features of the hotel."

*River Inn of Memphis, 50 Harbor Town Square, 260-3333, riverinnmemphis.com.* 



Lance Allan Wiedower

