

# Out and About

Sharon, Pa.

## Stress melts away at Buhl Mansion Guest House

By Rachel Weaver

Associate editor

Stepping onto the Buhl Mansion Guest House and Spa grounds in Sharon, it's easy for guests to forget they passed a slew of fast food joints and big-box stores just seconds before pulling into its driveway.

One glimpse at the regal stone building's spiraling turrets, sprawling gardens and elegant archways, and they're transported to a world where romance, serenity and self-indulgence reign supreme.

"It's like a decompression chamber," says Laura Ackley, Buhl Mansion general manager. "You can visibly see the stress level leaving."

The Buhl, located about an hour north of Pittsburgh, is a bed and breakfast inn ideal for couples stealing a weekend away, spouses celebrating marriage milestones or the engaged pair seeking the perfect spot for a fantasy wedding.

Mansion staff strives to "pamper guests within an inch of their lives," Ackley says, and they accomplish that goal with attention to every detail.

When they arrive on the property, guests are welcomed by name. As both their car and luggage are whisked away, couples are offered a glass of champagne. When checking in, there are no chest-high impersonal counters here. Guests take care of the matter while seated at an antique table and sipping their bubbly beverage.

Each of the Buhl's 10 rooms is equally luxurious yet distinctly different. To reach those on the third floor, guests ascend the wide grand oak staircase, where a mural of angels frolicking in a garden and a round, sparkling chandelier greet them at the landing.

The favored room by far, Ackley says, is Grand Gables with its upholstered sleigh bed, slanted 15-foot high ceiling and jacuzzi tub. The warm decor soothes with shades of copper and champagne.

Also popular is Grand Turret, where guests enjoying a Jacuzzi bath can look up to the 28-foot high cone-



THE BUHL Mansion, with its tall turrets and beautiful stone, is a modern day castle in downtown Sharon. Photo submitted

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# Buhl Mansion

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shaped, wooden ceiling.

Each bedroom at the Buhl has a Jacuzzi, fireplace, television and CD player and either a king or queen sized bed with down comforters. Awaiting guests in every bedroom is a welcome tray with cheese, fruit, crackers and more champagne.

The Buhl offers guests social activities, like tea service and cocktail parties, though it is totally up to individuals what they want to do.

"There are so many misconceptions about bed and breakfasts," Ackley says. "We're all about romance here. If you want to come down, come down. If you don't, don't."

While leaving their room might not be on most guests' itineraries, it is well worth it to do so. The castle's elegant common rooms hold more detail than one could observe in an overnight visit.

An airy sun room overlooking the garden offers guests the ideal spot for eating breakfast (assuming they opted not to eat it in bed). Two plush armchairs placed in front of the fireplace are the prime spot here, often reserved for the happy couple when a wedding party stays at the castle.

The formal parlor is elegant with cream walls and gold accents while the formal dining room is more dramatic with rich red chairs seated at the long table.

Tucked away on the lower level is the full-service Buhl Mansion Spa, which also is open to non-guests. Its serene setting with soft music, a flowing fountain and cool white decor embraces clients as they enjoy personal attention in private manicure, facial and massage rooms. The sauna, steam room and monsoon showers are complimentary for all mansion guests.

Ackley estimates 80 percent of spa patrons are couples who love the romance package, including side-by-side massages, facials and manicures, lunch and champagne.

It's not just the spa that caters to couples. No children are allowed to stay in the Buhl rooms, unless they are with a "Castle for the Day" party, which gives guests full reign of the mansion.

Traveling through the mansion's corridors, one can't help but stop and admire an uncanny rendition of Van Gough's "Self Portrait" or Monet's "Starry Night." These pieces, and 98 others that hang throughout the castle, were made by 10 commissioned artists, each assigned a master whose work he or she replicated.

It's special surprises like this that this year earned owners Jim and Donna Winner recognition as the title Inn Keeper of the Year by the Pennsylvania Tourism and Lodging Association. While the Buhl's history spans more than 100 years, the cou-



THE HIGHLIGHT of the grounds at the Buhl Mansion is the beautiful gardens, complete with greenhouse.

ple is responsible for saving it from demolition in 1996 and renovating it.

The mansion is the architectural legacy of Sharon's steel magnate, Frank Buhl, who founded Sharon Steel Corp. and was a partner in U.S. Steel Corp.

After graduating from Yale, Buhl came to Sharon where he wed Julia Forker in 1888. The newlywed wanted to build for his beautiful bride a castle designed by Charles Owsley, a Youngstown architect. Construction on the Richardsonian Romanesque

castle was completed in 1898 for \$60,000.

Throughout their lives, the Buhls made many other contributions to the Sharon area, including the area's first hospital, Oakwood Cemetery, F.H. Buhl Club, Buhl-Henderson Library, Julia F. Buhl Girls Club, St. John's Episcopal Church, Sharon Country Club and The F. H. Buhl Farm.

After Frank and Julia died, the mansion property changed hands many times and was stripped of

many of its architectural features including all the staircases, chandeliers, many doors and window casings and all but four fireplace mantles — all of which were sold off.

The Winners, who already owned Tara — A Country Inn in nearby Clark, bought the Buhl and poured their talents into transforming the neglected building into a luxurious establishment.

The restored Buhl Mansion will celebrate its 10th anniversary this New Year's Eve.

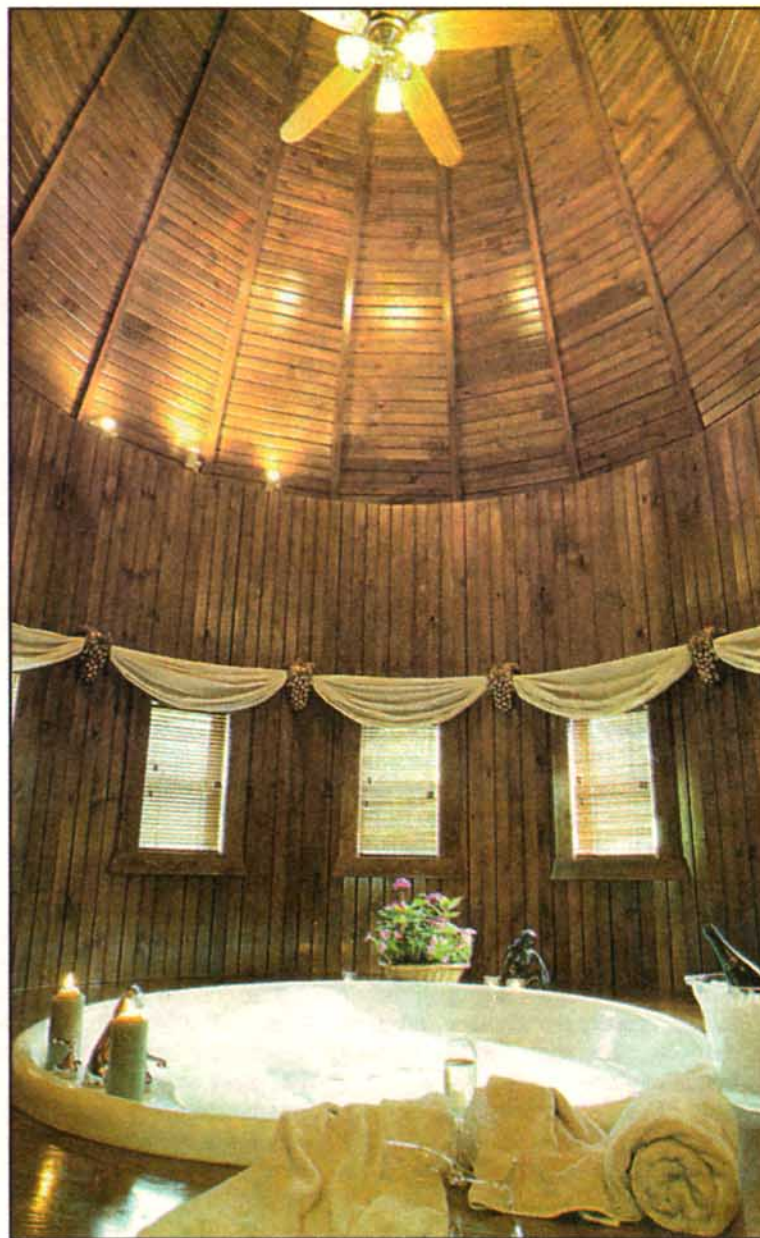


**FOR NEWLYWEDS**, nothing is preferred more than the regal Grand Gables room.



**THE 28-FOOT** high turret and Jacuzzi (at right) is the highlight of The Grand Turret (above), one of the Buhl's most popular rooms.

*Photos submitted*



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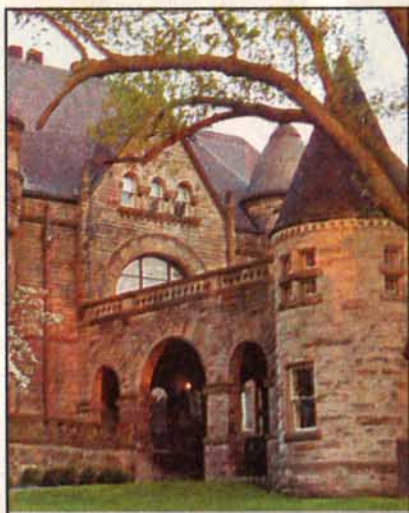
## IF YOU'RE GOING

The Buhl Mansion is located at 422 East State St. in Sharon, Mercer County. Phone number: 724-346-3046.

From the Pittsburgh area, take Interstate 70 North to the Interstate 80 exit.

Follow I-80 West to Exit 4B Sharon/Hermitage. Follow Route 18 North for 3 miles. Take a left onto East State Street and travel 3 miles.

The mansion is on the left.



## NEARBY ATTRACTIONS

■ Located just a parking lot away from the Buhl is Daffin's Candies, which offers enough chocolate and candy to last a lot longer than the drive home. Billing itself as the "World's Largest Candy Store," the shop features the Chocolate Kingdom, home to a 400-pound chocolate turtle, 125-pound chocolate reindeer and 75-pound chocolate frogs, among other sweet creatures. Guests get free samples. The shop can be reached at 724-342-2892.

■ For shopping, check out Reyers, known as the world's largest shoe store, in Sharon. A German cobbler started the store in the late 1880s. Today, it specializes in hard-to-find sizes for men and women. The shop is located at

40 South Water Ave. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call 1-800-245-1550.

■ Just down State Street sits The Winner, a fashion and collectibles outlet owned by the Winners, owners of Buhl Mansion.

Visitors interested in spending an afternoon shopping can peruse the selection of formal wear (including bridal gowns and prom dresses) as well as clothes for children, cruising and sports. The store also offers gift ideas. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The store, located at 32 West State St., can be reached at 1-800-344-2672.

**THE BUHL'S** sister property, Tara, greets guests with its impressive architecture.

*Photo by Rachel Weaver*



## Tara has Civil War-era rooms

Just a short drive down Route 18 lies the Buhl's sister property, Tara — A Country Inn.

In comparison to the Buhl, Tara is larger with 27 rooms and immersed in Civil War-era decor. Here, the owners display their extensive "Gone With the Wind" and Civil War collections.

Rooms here bear names such as Fiddle Dee Dee, Mason Dixon and Plantation. The first, an allusion to the words often uttered by Scarlett O'Hara, is feminine with pale blue and white colors, a queen-sized sleigh bed, sofa bed and fireplace.

Mason Dixon is an homage to the Confederate flag with its colors dominating the room. The Plantation Suite is Tara's largest room and has a

French country feel complete with Jacuzzi, fireplace, king-sized bed and office.

Sen. Charles Koonce built Tara in 1854 and it seems not much has changed inside its walls since. Female staffers greet guests in Civil War-era, floor-length cotton dresses. One dining room holds one of the largest Civil War gun collections in the country. The guns are displayed in glass cabinets on the wall.

The Buhl offers complimentary limo service to Tara where there are two public restaurants: Stonewalls Tavern, a pub for a more low-key experience, and Ashley's Gourmet Dining Room, for a formal, seven-course feast.