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natural INFLUENCES

BY PAULA ROY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK HOLLERON

One of Ontario's most charming and historic towns just became a much more delicious destination with the recent opening of The Lobby Bar at the Almonte Riverside Inn. Tucked beside the Mississippi River, the upscale, six-room inn is a luxurious retreat, with The Lobby Bar serving up inventive cocktails and inspired dinners every day of the week.

Proprietors Hunter and Angie Little, worked with the Inn's owner, Rod Prior, to come up with a fresh, new concept for the cute and compact restaurant that now seats twenty. A personal connection through their sons' hockey teams drew Rod together with Lisa Poirier, owner of Westyle Interior Design, who was instrumental in transforming the space in under two months.



Hunter, who served most recently as sous chef at the acclaimed Riviera restaurant, is excited to be putting his own unique culinary spin on the ever-evolving menu at The Lobby Bar. An abundant garden right outside his kitchen influences many dishes, as do the classic cocktails which Angie helps create, having worked at Fauna prior to giving birth to their daughter last year.

As Angie explains, “We had a vision for the space but Lisa really refined it and pulled it all together. She helped us maximize the bar so there is room for guests to eat and drink with a view into the kitchen.”

Although she doesn't typically do much restaurant design work, preferring to focus on home design and renovation projects, Lisa says she was eager to take

on this job, despite the compressed timeline. She confirms that making good use of every square inch of the small room was a key objective, as was creating a bar that offered visual appeal along with functionality.

“It helped that they really had a solid vision so we could get things done quickly and that their vision fit the space,” says Lisa. “I would not have taken on this project if I couldn't work within their timeline, but as soon as I saw the Inn I got really excited about the possibilities for transformation, to create a unique restaurant that suits the heritage building and really reflects the client's aesthetic and style.” Lisa coordinated the trades including Christian Guibord of Millstrong Cabinets in Hammond.



LEFT A RUSTIC VIBE SUITS THE SETTING FOR COMPACT BAR/RESTAURANT

RIGHT HUNTER (SEATED) AND ANGIE CATCH A MOMENT TO ENJOY THE OUTDOOR SPACE WITH DESIGNER, LISA POIRER (RIGHT)



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The design aesthetic is rooted in the traditions of an old English country inn, confirms Hunter. “We wanted a classic style incorporating a hint of florals and a little bit of an old-world flair to create a space that feels instantly relaxing and welcoming.” The look incorporates the natural environment of trees, rocks and water visible from the windows and the adjacent 12-seat patio.

Hunter’s seasonally-driven food is similarly European inspired, promoting the vegetable-focused, farm-to-table movement which is rightfully so popular now. “What we can’t grow ourselves, we purchase from local farms so the menu will evolve accordingly, moving from brighter summer fare to heartier fall options,” he explains. “As befits the traditional hotel lobby bar, we also feature timeless hors d’oeuvres and bar snacks.”

The atmosphere of The Lobby Bar is complemented by using vintage glassware and silver trays sourced from local antique shops. The flexible space is ideal for special gatherings and both Hunter and Angie are enthusiastic about hosting events such as their popular trivia nights. They are looking forward to chef takeover dinners, winemakers’ dinners and more.

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