The Delft Room at the Inn at Depot Hill got the seal of approval from Martha Stewart when she stayed at the inn a few years ago.

World view

Hotels & Boarding Houses

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Former railroad depot transformed into an inn with global appeal

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SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Style doyenne Martha Stewart would have approved of the Delft Room at the Inn at Depot Hill, with its feather bed draped in linen and Belgian lace and its antique Dutch tiles.

In fact, that's exactly what Stewart did when she came to the Capitola bed and breakfast a few years ago and stayed in the room that was inspired by a Dutch summer home.

"She loved it," said Inn founder Suzie Lankes. "She said she had just written about a bed and breakfast for her magazine and wished she done ours instead."

THE INN-SIDER

But you don't need to be Martha Stewart to appreciate the inn's decor or the thoughtful little gestures the staff lavishes on its guests: things like bringing a glass of water on a silver tray or making sure a guest's bottle of special champagne is chilled and waiting for them before they even unpack.

In fact, you might even want to borrow some of their ideas when your own summer guests come into town.

The inn, which sits on a bluff above Capitola, was once a Southern Pacific Railroad depot.

Built in 1910, it was just big enough to accommodate the summer tourists and their baggage, about 1,000 square feet.

When Lankes and co-founder Dan Floyd discovered the depot building 11 years ago, there was a bachelor doctor living there. It had about as much resemblance to what it is today as a steam locomotive has to the Concorde.

"We had four architects turn us down," Lankes said, standing in the inn's herringbone brick courtyard

"We told them we needed eight rooms and we wanted a patio and parking spaces and a manager's unit.

"They all said, 'No way.' "

But Lankes and Floyd, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist, persisted, and today, the inn has 12 rooms, gardens and all the parking it needs.

As soon as 4,000 square feet was added to the inn, Lankes and Floyd — along with Floyd's sister-in law, San Francisco designer Linda Floyd — went to work.

Playing off a railroad theme, the three decided to design each room around a world destination: Paris, Portofino, the Cote d'Azur, Kyoto.

In the Paris room, for instance, guests will feel as if they've stepped into an elegant apartment overlooking the Seine.

The room is decorated in just two colors — black and off-white — and its walls are covered in handmade French toile fabric.
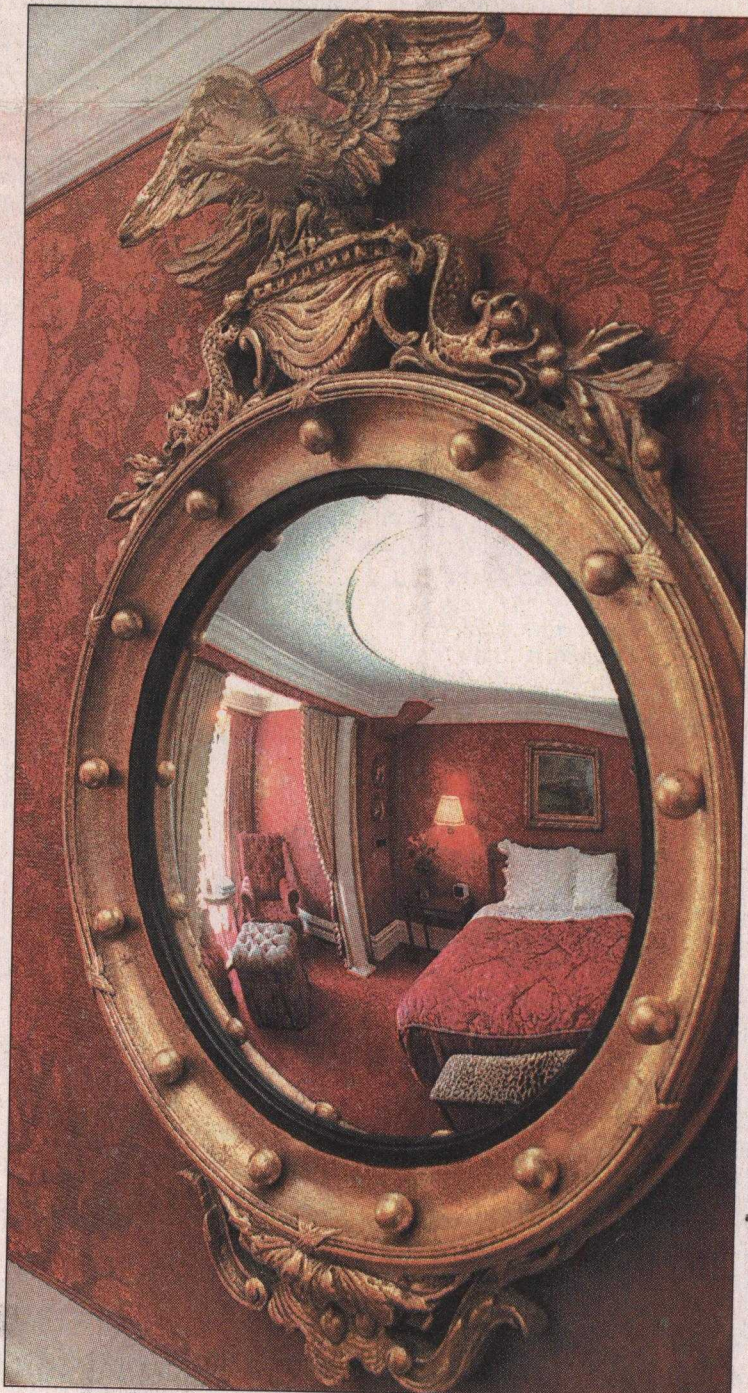
Louis XVI lamps send a soft light over the half-canopied feather bed. Overstuffed chairs are perfect for reading.

But the best, and most romantic, feature sits right in the middle of the room: a gas fireplace.

Because there were three designers involved in the project, they decided they would agree on everything,

The Railroad Baron room at the Inn at Depot Hill features voluptuous red fabric walls and heavy gold silk drapes.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Inn founder Suzie Lankes and manager Tom Cole at the Inn at Depot Hill in Capitola

Inn-sider: Capitola inn gives visitors a taste of faraway places

except for three rooms.

Each designer would get their own room to decorate — no vetoes allowed.

For Dan Floyd, that became the Railroad Baron room — a suite with voluptuous red fabric walls, heavy gold silk drapes and a leopard-print footstool.

With its domed ceiling and a bed that's as big as a dining car, it's not a room where the guests think, "Hmmm, what's on the 'The Tonight Show?'" as they walk through the door.

"Men, especially, seem to love the Railroad Baron's room," Lankes said.

Lankes' room, the Capitola Beach, is across the hall and, as opposed to the Railroad Baron room, whispers its style.

Decorated in a restful, monochromatic blend of sand, white and taupe, it features a specially designed canopy bed from Ironies in San Francisco and

drapes of rich fabric.

Shell lights cast a warm glow on the wall. The checkerboard carpet looks like Roman tile but feels like heaven.

"You should always have a little of yourself in a room," Lankes said. "It's important not to turn everything over to an interior designer and say, 'Do whatever you want.'

"The interior designer should put in all the little extra touches and details that really set it apart.

"But the rest is yours."

That philosophy is evident to visitors who get a chance to wander through the inn's rooms: The Valencia, with its goldenrod walls and royal blue carpet, is modeled after a beautiful plate Lankes found while traveling in Valencia, Spain; the Kyoto room, with rice-paper sliders, has a luxurious shower that makes you feel like you are standing under an outdoor waterfall.

Each room, said Lankes, is designed to make a guest feel comfortable.

And feeling comfortable and welcome is the motto at the Inn at Depot Hill, according to manager Tom Cole.

The staff's job is to anticipate what guests don't even know they need and give it to them.

"Our challenge is to exceed their expectations," Cole said.

That included once sending a staff member to Scotts Valley to retrieve a gasoline cap a guest had inadvertently left behind after a fill-up.

Even though rooms are pricey — between $220 and $325 — the inn has a long list of loyal visitors.

One family came from England to spend the Christmas holidays in California, according to Lankes.

They got four rooms — one for the parents and one for each of their three children.

If You Go

WHAT: Inn at Depot Hill.
WHERE: 250 Monterey Ave., Capitola.
DETAILS: Twelve rooms, some with private gardens and hot tubs. Received the AAA 4-Diamond rating for lodging. Full breakfast, wine and hors d'oeuvres, homemade desserts.
COST: $220-$325.
INFO: 462-3376 or www.cacoastalinns.com.

They must have enjoyed their time at the inn.

They stayed 29 days.

Inn-sider is an occasional column featuring area inns.

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