Ready for another escape to Inn San Francisco

Inn San Francisco is a wonderful bed and breakfast. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

SAN FRANCISCO – Feeling at home – it's not something most lodging establishments are able to pull off.

The Inn San Francisco made me feel like I was back living in San Francisco for three spectacular days and nights in September, instead of merely being a guest in the city I once called home.

This 1870s era Victorian is nestled in among other houses just like it. It's part of the original mansion row. In 1906, the four-day fire from the devastating earthquake burned to within 1.5 blocks of the South Van Ness property.

Marty Neely, who with his wife Connie Wu, own the bed and breakfast, is the consummate host, as opposed to a traditional innkeeper. Their dog Marshmallow adds to the homey feeling.

Neely gives arriving guests a tour of the 27-room

establishment – so they know where the sherry is, that the hot tub never closes and that when the fog rolls out the views from the roof are stunning.

Arriving late that Thursday, it was time to fill the stomach with food. Neely whips out a sheet of paper with more restaurants in walking distance of the B&B than are in the entire South Shore of Lake Tahoe.

We opt for Beretta on Valencia and 23rd streets. The 45-minute wait for a table at 8:30pm throws us off because that doesn't happen in the mountains. We find a seat at the bar and let Ryan fix us rum concoctions with names like Dolores Park Swizzle and Agricole Mule – each $9.

Ryan knows a lot of the people shuffling in. He says it's a slow night. The place is packed. What would a busy night look like? What would it be like if there weren't a recession?

Sue and I split a pizza filled with grilled veggies, tomatoes, spinach, pesto and mozzarella. It's a tad greasy, but at $12 is priced right.

Today it's my birthday

It's time for another meal – breakfast at the inn. It's my birthday, so it's time to celebrate. Sue brings out the champagne so all the guests can partake in mimosas.

Breakfast is a nice blend of European and American – with a cheese-meat platter, mass quantities of fresh fruit (with non-traditional selections like kiwi and mango), hot-cold cereal, sweet breads, hardboiled eggs, juice, and coffee. Platters seem to always be full even though the plates of guests are as well.

The nice thing is breakfast seems to be available all morning; none of this one-hour window to be fed. It's leisurely, relaxed – it's like being at home.

The staff seems invisible except when you need them. Some have worked at the inn for more than 15 years.

This area of San Francisco is experiencing a bit of a renaissance. Mission and Valencia streets are a couple blocks away, as is Market Street.

Our mission, literally, is to find the mission. In all my time in San Francisco I had never been to Mission Dolores.

First stop, though, is the swing set at Mission Dolores Park. People are out enjoying the unseasonably warm weather with friends, family and dogs. The vast greenway beckons Frisbee throwers.

Just up the block is the mission. Like all of the missions in California that I've visited, the architecture is breathtaking, the craftsmanship of the woodwork exquisite and the delicateness of the stained glass inspiring.

We take our time strolling through the neighborhood – on sidewalks. Bookstores seem be in nearly every block. I spend some cash on a book about cycling.

Hunger pangs sound the alarm that a bite to eat is necessary. I'm in vegetarian heaven – a restaurant called Herbivore is dead ahead on Valencia Street.

To save room for dinner, Sue and I split the Vegetable Sampler ($8.25). Charbroiled veggies come with three sauces – pesto, tahini and lemon garlic. With our glasses of white wine, the bill comes to $23.06.

Life at the inn

It's time to enjoy the Inn San Francisco's roof. Comfy outdoor furniture is situated to look at the skyline. A smidgeon of the Bay Bridge is visible. At night, the lights of AT&T Park are on when the Giants are home. Views of Twin Peaks are 45 degrees to the left.

A queen bed dominates our cozy room. Some of the rooms look like estates. Some have shared baths. Our bathroom was private, but was down the hall.

The antique decor is so appropriate for such an old dwelling. Still, a mini flat screen TV is in one corner for those who are in need of such diversions.

Dinner is at Greens – one of my favorite restaurants in San Francisco. (See story in the Food-Wine section.)

Entertainment that night is the SF Symphony. The next day it's all about the fun in Golden Gate Park. (See story in Lifestyle.)

Part of one afternoon is spent in the inn's garden enjoying cheese and crackers, and wine we brought in. It's relaxing – like being in your own backyard, but not having to do the pruning.

Plush robes are perfect to wrap ourselves in as we walk down the narrow stairs to the outdoor redwood hot tub.

Inside, people are enjoying the common area. Fortunately, there is no television here. It's about decompressing. Books are everywhere. Soft music plays. Friendships are made.

Finally, it was time to say goodbye – though, I hope not for long.

Rooms run from $120 to $335 per night. Covered parking is an additional $18/night. For more information, go to www.innsf.com or call (415) 641.0188.

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