

# The inn place

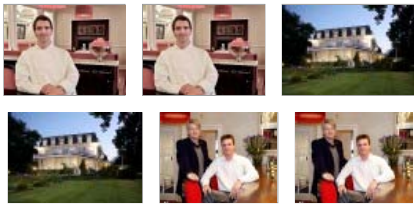
Boutique hotel helps partners from the Netherlands find and build a sense of community in Camden

By Emily Burnham  
BDN Staff



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CAMDEN HARBOUR INN

Executive chef Lawrence Klang, who is European-trained and has won several U.S. honors, revamped the Natalie's menu.



Raymond Brunyanszki and Oscar Verest knew they wanted to move to New England. After years spent working in the hotel and pharmaceutical industries, respectively, in their home country of the Netherlands, they were ready for a slower pace. The natural beauty and small-town living of the region appealed to them. But where?

"At first we wanted to move to Vermont, but Oscar was hesitant," said Brunyanszki. "We went to Maine, to Ogunquit. Oscar was standing on the beach. He said 'I could see myself living here.' As we say in the Netherlands, I said 'Chicken, I got you!' Which means, like, OK, you said it. I'll hold you to it."

After narrowing it down to Maine, the partners began scoping out the Pine Tree State, looking for living and business opportunities. They were headed up Route 1, toward Bar Harbor, and stopped in Camden for just an afternoon.

"I was immediately attracted to Camden. You have it all here — mountains, the sea, and this beautiful little picture-postcard village," he said. "You don't have a lot of options, but everything that is here is great. Movies, skiing, dining, shopping. It's a wonderful community."

The pair was sold on the coastal town. Further investigation revealed that the Camden Harbour Inn, the rambling old Bayview Street hotel built in 1874, was up for sale. In February of 2007, Brunyanszki and Verest purchased it with the intent of a major, major renovation. They gutted the place, replacing outdated things, and renovating the classically Maine elements. They also purchased Natalie's, the Camden eatery formerly housed in the old Knox Mill, and brought it over to the Inn.

In late 2007, the Camden Harbour Inn and Natalie's re-opened as something totally unique: an impeccably designed, top-quality boutique hotel and restaurant, the likes of which Maine has never truly seen. In fact, few in the United States have probably had the opportunity to experience a place like the one Brunyanszki and Verest have created. It's equal parts opulent French decor, old-fashioned New England charm and cutting-edge contemporary. The pair put their hearts and souls into the place — and it shows.

"I definitely have an eye for detail. It's a big show that we put on. The worst thing I could ever get would be a complaint. If someone says dinner is taking too long, I could go into the kitchen and cry. If something is out of place, I'm the first one to notice. I guess I'm kind of an insecure person," said Brunyanszki, with a self-deprecating laugh.

Insecure or not, there's much to love about the place. Like the breezy, creaky, wraparound porch, which harkens back to turn-of-the-century Maine. The plush red luxury of Natalie's, with its Parisian atmosphere. And the rooms, each with its own distinct character, and each named after a famous port of the Dutch East India Trading Company — a nod to the pair's Dutch roots. Some rooms feature Asian accents, some have art deco elements. All boast views of either the Camden Hills or the harbor.

The Natalie's menu was completely revamped, thanks to executive chef Lawrence Klang, who was hand-picked by Brunyanszki and Verest after an exhaustive international search. Klang, trained at Le Cordon Bleu L'Art Culinaire in London, has received several major honors since joining Natalie's. These include winning the 2008 People's Choice Award for the Maine Lobster Chef of the Year competition and having his special Christmas dinner, "A Maine Noel," featured at the James Beard House in New York City in December of 2008. Also that year, AAA gave both the Inn and Natalie's a four-diamond rating.

Brunyanszki, naturally, is not surprised in the least by the praise for Klang's cooking.

"I was so attracted to his calmness and modesty, and his passion for food. We wanted someone who was European trained, but Lawrence was so easy going and well spoken," said Brunyanszki. "Then I tasted his cooking and was just blown away. He's so modest that he would never speak for himself, but I don't have that problem, so I will be the first to praise him. We are so lucky to have him."

Besides the food, Natalie's and the Inn work to please not just guests from away, but also those who live in Camden and the surrounding areas. Brunyanszki regularly organizes events to coincide with various concerts and performances, such as the upcoming eat-and-stay "Says You" package, organized around the live broadcast of the public radio show "Says You" set for March 28 at the Camden Opera House. Brunyanszki has also brought up performers, such as the European drag troupe the Working Girls, and cabaret performer Edie.

"We want to give back to the community in some way. They've supported us so much," said Brunyanszki. "And they are very open with us. They criticize us. They suggest things. I have piles of CDs on my desk that come out of the community. We hope to help create a little village society."

It may be meticulously designed, and it may feature some of the best fine dining in the state, but the inn and restaurant never feel pretentious or unwelcoming. And that's exactly what Brunyanszki and Verest want.

"We try to make a connection with our guests in more than just our service and amenities," said Brunyanszki. "We want to see what drives them, and what they like. If we see that you drink Diet Coke, you'll end up with Diet Coke in your minibar. We want people to feel like they're at home. A very

luxurious home, but home."

The Camden Harbor Inn and Natalie's, located at 83 Bayview St., are open year-round. Executive chef Lawrence Klang will be a guest chef at the Michelin two-star restaurant Ciel Bleu in Amsterdam between March 10 and 15, where he will join forces with one of the Netherland's most talented chefs Onno Kokmeijer. For more information, visit [www.camdenharborinn.com](http://www.camdenharborinn.com).

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