

The Owners Story

A small note from the Lords of the Manor,

Why we bought this place and what made us restore this back to its former glory, and more.

On entering the grounds some years back on our Harley Davidson's, Brad, Murray and myself were taken back with the sheer splendour and beauty of what we had just stumbled accross. This was the first time we knew of a place up here in the midlands that was so grandure and castle like. As soon as I entered the hotel, which was pretty run down at the time, I just knew that I had to have this place. I wanted this to be part of my familys history and whomever wanted in, would have to feel the same way as I did.

We met up with the lady in the bar which was still in her sleep top and pants at about 10am.. Unlike the lord we were expecting, she was not wanting to sell. After lots of persuasion and negotiating backwards and forwards, we came up with a happy figure which we thought was a good deal.

On acceptance of the offer, I asked the other two musketers, if they were keen to be part of history in the making. Brad immediately said that he was in and unfortunately Murray had other things that he needed to attend to. So Brad and myself signed the deal on the 13th Dec 2006 and the official transfer went through towards the end of Jan 2007. We were the new proud owners of the Swiss Manor as it was then called.

Brad and myself thought it would be a great idea to show our wives Liz and Shona the trophy we had just acquired. Their first impression on arrival, like ours, was that of happiness and excitement. Soon after they had been there, they took a walk around the place delving into the finer details such as the rooms and kitchen areas. They then approached us in the

bar and to our surprise, they were not impressed at all. They also asked if we were able to get out of the deal..

Not a chance we said. This was a weekend getaway for our families and we did not need a fancy place to stay in. Never the less, we then decided to have a total re-vamp of the hotel from top to toe, just to keep them happy.. Each room was pulled apart and all beds, cupboards and virtually everything in the manor, had to be replaced. The carpets were moth eaten and the beds were like sleeping in a sponge bath.. There was no toilets for the staff, no running water and no lights in their rooms. We figured out that we were in way over our heads and had to look at this seriously. Spending millions on the re-vamp was a risky affair as we are not hoteliers as such but looking back, it's been the best decision we made.

We decided to get in a real stone mason, which to our surprise we found in Mooiriver. He also did his apprenticeship in the Cotswold's, England where the original Oates family was from whom built the place. We also got in Peter Bretherton, an interior decorator to do all our furnishes as we felt he was the best at his game and would live our brand.

While doing the re-vamp which took over 2 months, we had plenty of people popping in to see what was happening and staying over in some in the rooms that were complete. We had a Canadian and his grumpy girlfriend stay over the one night as they were lost and could not find a place to stay. It was around 10pm at night. We had no rooms available as there were no beds in any of the rooms. We told them they could stay in the garden suite as they are now called. They were very basic and just had the bare essentials such as a bed and a toilet.. She was not impressed needless to say, but he was only too happy. He came back to the bar soon after checking in without his girlfriend. We found out that he was a rodeo rider with a huge belt buckle to prove it and would not swop it for anything. We were trying to offer him all the memorabilia that was on the walls, which we did not want anyway. After a good

few glasses of the best and cheapest red wine, we taught him how to ride a rhino compared to his stallion.. (a 4 x 4 Yamaha rhino) at 2.30am. The story is too long to tell on this page but we'll tell you the whole story when we meet up in the bar some time.. It's worth a listen and a laugh over a few cold frosties or some good red wine this time. Not the cheap stuff.

Incidentally, we got a email from him a week later after returning to Canada, saying that his experience and the fun he had that night was the best ever and did not know rhino riding was such fun. We made his whole South African experience worth it. We found this rewarding apart from the fact that he we wanted to sue us for almost rolling the rhino with him on the back.

We also had a film crew from Amsterdam stay with us for 2 weeks through our re-vamp and this was a true wake up call to what the hotel industry was all about.. We learnt that once someone orders a hamburger, they own you till the have finished their last mouth full. Coming from a clothing background, is a bit different from serving burgers. It's about selling the sizzle in this industry and then backing it up with the best meal they have ever had..

At times, we felt that this was like the faulty towers of Mooiriver. We employed a few managers along the way as most of them did not cut the chase and did to buy into our vision we had of our hotel. We wanted a 4 star Hotel giving a 5 to 6 star service...

About 30 years ago when the Hotel was bought and renamed the Swiss Manor, all the windows we replaced with double glazed windows were brought in from Switzerland which are ideal for the extreme weather conditions we experience. They are the genuine windows and keep the hotel warm in the winter and cool in summer. The walls are 43" thick and the stone is hand crafted from the granite pit that is about 5 km from the

Hotel. These were brought to the top of the hill by horse and cart and took Mr Edward Oats and his laborer about 10 years to complete what is today the Lords of the Manor.

We've been told loads of stories from various people that had lived here before and some who knew the past owners. The one story that stands out is the fact that there might be a bag of diamonds hidden beneath the floorboards or under a hidden rock somewhere in the Hotel. Rumour has it, the owner whom was supposedly dealt in diamonds at the time, many years ago, got shot by a sniper while sitting in our bar. He is not around to tell the real story. We still have the door where the bullet was lodged. While we were doing the re-vamp, Brad and myself were convinced that we were going to find them. We've spent hours looking everywhere for these diamonds but to date, have not found them.. Pop in to see it for yourself and Bryan – our Manager will have many other interesting stories to keep you amused for many hours.

If you looking for the best pub in the region I'll guarantee you, we have it. We are famous for our six week old duck special and our oxtail pie alongside my favourite been the lamb shank. We want people to experience the same feeling that we had when we first saw our place and and for you to be part of the history.

History they say, is a work in progress and that's what we are keeping in tact. It's tar roads the whole way and only 4 km off the freeway. It will be worth the drive and if you get a chance, send me a mail to let me know what you think.. This article is also a work in progress and will be updated as we go along.

Hope to see you here soon.

Terry Gormley (Owner)

terry@lordsofthemanor.co.za

