

A renovated Whitehall opens May 15

By Kim Lincoln | May 13, 2015

11



Photo by: Kim Lincoln

Chef Sam Talbot, center, is set to open Pig + Poet Restaurant in the Whitehall, now owned by Lark Hotels. Lark's Chief Inspiration Officer Dawn Hagin, left, and Regional Manager Jeb Thomas have been overseeing the inn's renovation.



[View More...](#)

CAMDEN — More than a decade ago, Rob Blood and his future bride, Leigh, were standing at the edge of Camden Harbor when they had a conversation about owning a local inn.

Fourteen years later, the Bloods, who are from Newburyport, Mass., are set to open the historic Whitehall May 15. Blood is the CEO of Lark Hotels, a hotel brand and management company that owns 15 properties throughout New England and California, which now includes the Whitehall.

When the Bloods were married, the couple stayed at the inn and also aboard the windjammer *Mistress* for their honeymoon and have made return trips to the Whitehall over the years.

"We always had our eyes on this place — it's a great building with great history. The Midcoast is a special place for us," Rob Blood said.

The hotel, which first opened in 1901, was originally called Whitehall, without the "inn" as part of its name. In the 1920s, "inn" was added,

Whitehall history

In 1901, a young widow who had spent her honeymoon in Camden purchased an 1834 sea captain's house.

said Dawn Hagin, chief inspiration officer for Lark Hotels.

It will now be known, once again, as Whitehall.

The historic hotel, which is famous for launching Camden poet Edna St. Vincent Millay's career, has been completely renovated to embrace Camden's motto "Where the mountains meet the sea," Hagin said.

The design firm Rachel Reider Interiors designed the 36 guest rooms and suites, and a carpet resembling ocean waves is found throughout the guest areas. In addition to the hotel's revamped oversized porches, an outdoor lounge with a fire pit, extensive common areas and lounging spaces, the hotel will feature a revolving collection of art by local Maine artists.

Phi Home Design of Rockport performed the inn's renovation.

Chef Sam Talbot, who was runner-up on Season 2 of Bravo's "Top Chef," will operate Pig + Poet restaurant inside the inn, which will be open to the general public and can seat up to 125 patrons for dinner. The Pig + Poet name continues to embrace Millay, but also encompasses Talbot's signature pork dishes, Hagin said.

Pig + Poet will focus on Maine's farmland and fisheries, featuring a raw bar and dishes such as Talbot's Porchetta with Eggs and Poet Hot Sauce; Grilled Clams with Nori Butter, Shiso, and Chinese Mustard; and his take on a Grilled Cowboy Steak complemented by Japanese eggplant, Peekytoe Crab Croutons, Smoked Garlic Greens and Toast. Talbot also said he will offer a satellite bar in the outside seating area, which will serve a la carte lobster rolls and drinks.

Talbot, who also operates restaurants in Montauk, N.Y., and Manhattan, was looking for a neat opportunity outside of the city and Camden was the perfect fit, Hagin said.

Talbot said he will incorporate produce from more than 90 local farms into his dishes. His cooking style focuses on clean eating, he said. "Everything that goes into my body, I like to know where it came from," Talbot said, adding that his motto is, "Cook Nice," which is to treat food nicely and the area where it comes from just as nicely.

"I've always loved the great outdoors and having a real connection to the food that comes out of my kitchen," Talbot said in a news release published in December. "It's become a bit of a cliché to say that my food is farm-to-fork, but that's truly what it will be. Being in Camden is an inspiring opportunity for me to work with new local vendors, flavors and experiences. I have always been drawn to the water and waterfront towns, and I'm excited to join the amazing food movement going on in the Midcoast, Portland and throughout Maine."

The Whitehall and Pig + Poet open for the season Friday, May 15, and will be open until mid-October.

The first of only six owners, she took in a handful of summer guests for income, and then added rooms each year until she operated Whitehall, one of only five hotels in Camden at the start of the century.

It was the summer home for the elite of Camden's summer visitors. Guests would arrive by train with maids or in chauffeur-driven cars.

Royalty, titans of industry and celebrities, both famous and infamous, made Whitehall a part of their summer schedule. The inn has welcomed a king, a U.S. president and other political notables, many screen stars and sports heroes. And the guest list includes a supermodel, a legendary TV anchorman and a world-renowned singer-songwriter. And, of course, one of America's most beloved poets, Edna St. Vincent Millay, was "discovered" in the hotel.

Whitehall has been featured in two Hollywood productions, including the original 1957 "Peyton Place," and more recently Stephen King's "Thinner."

Information from whitehallmaine.com