

This boutique hotel in the Bluegrass is historic and homey

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THE GRATZ PARK INN in Lexington could easily be mistaken for one of the intimate boutique hotels you might find on New York's Upper East Side or in London's Knightsbridge district.

Gas fires glow in the hearths. Nineteenth century paintings and hand-tinted prints adorn the walls. Vases of fresh flowers and king- and queen-sized mahogany four-poster beds grace the bedrooms.

"The hotel feels a lot more like somebody's house," says inn manager Elizabeth Holmes. "We really appeal to people who want an historic atmosphere, who want something special."

Holmes notes that many of the Gratz Park Inn guests come back again and again. The hotel is always full during the Keeneland horse sales, and many thoroughbred owners who live outside of the Bluegrass stay at the inn when they travel to Lexington to visit their horses at nearby farms.

THE GRATZ PARK INN has had its share of celebrity visitors, too. Holmes, who has worked there since 1991, mentions actors Sharon Stone and Albert Finney as memorable visitors, as well as thriller novelist Stephen King. She recalls each of them as being extremely courteous to the staff and very friendly. But Finney stands out.

"He was just wonderful," Holmes says. "He learned everyone's name and always asks after us individually."

Did King perhaps choose the Gratz Park Inn because of its purported ghosts?

"There are some of the staff members who say they've seen *something*," acknowledges Holmes. But she smiles and shakes her head at the idea. "All that's settled down in the last few years."

With or without resident apparitions, the hotel is a notable place.

The Federalist-style, three-story, brick building opened in 1916 as the Lexington Clinic. It was the brainchild of three local physicians who envisioned a medical facility for Central Kentucky modeled on Minnesota's famed Mayo Clinic. The clinic operated until the 1950s at the edge of the historic Gratz Park District (where Henry Clay's law offices and John Hunt Morgan's home are located).

For the next two decades, the building housed offices. It stood empty from the end of the '70s to the mid-'80s, when developers recognized its potential as a small hotel.

And while the inn was briefly under the management of Camberley, which owns the Algonquin hotel in New York City and the Brown Hotel in Louisville, Gratz Park is locally owned by Central Kentucky businessman Tom Isaacs and his associates.

THE HOTEL HAS a grand total of just 44 rooms. Thirty-eight are regular guest rooms and six are suites. Each one is a little different, with its own color scheme and floor plan.

Windows may have elegant wooden shutters or flowing curtains. Rich tones of deep red and green accented with cream complement the reproductions of 19th century furniture. And although all of the rooms have period charm, they also have modern conveniences such as televisions hidden in armoires and telephone data ports for laptop computers located on spacious desks.

The inn has a downstairs meeting room that can accommodate up to 100 people, but perhaps its

