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Greer inn among Fodor's world top 10

John Stanley
The Arizona Republic
Nov. 13, 2005 12:00 AM

The word is out.

Those in the know have enjoyed the rustic elegance of the Red Setter Inn & Cottages since it opened in 1995. Now, all the world knows about eastern Arizona's luxurious bed-and-breakfast, thanks to the blabbermouths at Fodor's, the pre-eminent publisher of travel guides, which named the inn one of its top 10 Choice Hotels for 2006.

Not just in Arizona, mind you. And not just in the United States. advertisement

We're talking top 10 in the world.

"I am just absolutely blown away," said Jim Sankey, who owns and operates the idyllic country inn with his partner, Ken Conant, in Greer. "We've worked very hard and we keep what we think is a fabulous place, but this just takes the wind out of me."

In addition to fine hotels, Fodor's Choice Winter 2006 list includes 10 restaurants and 10 unforgettable sights or experiences (for top 10 lists, see page T4).

"We polled 600 writers and editors from all over the world for their picks," said Erica Kestenbaum, spokeswoman for Fodor's. "We were really looking for the unique, not-to-be-missed places, places that were accessible domestically as well as abroad, a well-rounded list for all price ranges."

Kestenbaum said Fodor's was impressed not only by the charm of the Red Setter Inn itself, but by its natural setting in the tall pines along the banks of the West Fork of the Little Colorado River. At an elevation of 8,500 feet, the inn is an all-season destination.

Asked what he thought put them in such exclusive company, Sankey paused for a moment.

"It's the service, I think," he said. "As owners, we're involved in the entire process, from cleaning to cooking to making sure everything is of the highest quality."

Sankey and Conant are transplanted Californians, refugees from corporate America. When his company offered Sankey an early retirement package in 1993, he took it and ran.

The two men had planned to open a B&B in the Pacific Northwest, but a chance visit to Greer changed their minds.

"We rolled the dice and opened the Red Setter," Sankey said. They named the inn for a pair of dogs they owned at the time, red setters with the stately names of Shawn Trevor and Shillelagh McFann.

Sankey designed the B&B himself, incorporating the best features of the European inns he and Conant had visited over the years. The plan, Sankey said, was to keep the intimacy, quaintness and decor characteristic of European inns while adding American-style amenities.

The walls of the inn are made with hand-hewn lodgepole pine logs from Colorado and Montana. Large common rooms feature vaulted ceilings, rock-faced fireplaces and comfortable furniture. Many of the individual rooms have fireplaces and Jacuzzis, and some open onto a private deck with sumptuous views. The décor is a cozy combination of antique furnishings, elegant embroideries and snuggly down comforters.

After a hearty, home-cooked breakfast of salmon Benedict, quiche or French

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The Red Setter Inn & Cottages

Where: About 225 miles from central Phoenix. Take Loop 202 east, Arizona 87 (Beeline Highway) north to Payson, Arizona 260 east through Pinetop-Lakeside and Arizona 373 south to Greer. The inn is on Main Street at the southern end of town.

Rates: Begin at \$150 per night.

Children: Must be at least 16.

Pets: No.

Smoking: No.

Details:
www.redsetterinn.com or 1-888-994-7337.

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toast, you can stroll across the nearly 10-acre grounds, explore the adjacent Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests or relax by a crackling fire while you read or visit with other guests. In the winter months, you can go cross-country skiing, sledding or riding in a horse-drawn sleigh.

"You know how people come back from a vacation and say they can't describe it in words, but it just has to be experienced? We feel (the Red Setter) is that kind of place," Kestenbaum said.

The Red Setter, she added, shows that you don't have to travel halfway around the world and spend a ton of money to have a great vacation experience.

"It could be in your own back yard in Greer, Arizona," she said.

Although the inn now stands in lofty company, Sankey doesn't plan to make any changes.

"We'll go on the same way we always have," he said. "We still think of (the Red Setter) as just a quiet, peaceful little place."

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