

# Gracious High Style in Wilkes- Barre

To all of our readers who requested a peek inside Pennsylvania's Stegmaier Mansion, we proudly present this incredibly and lovingly restored Victorian masterpiece.

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Enter the Stegmaier Mansion's Gentlemen's Parlor and step back in time. Dark, carved wood furniture, rich paneling on the walls and scarlet draperies appoint the room where Frederick Stegmaier would entertain his male guests.



Even as a child, Joseph Matteo was mesmerized by all things Victorian, especially Victorian architecture. “Every year, on our annual family vacation,” Joe recalls, “we would drive by the Asa Packer Mansion in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. I could see this fabulous mansion high on the hill and wish I could go in.”

Grown up, Joe did tour the Packer Mansion many times and every other Victorian era home he could find, with a special fascination for the mansions of Newport, Rhode Island. He always knew that he wanted to own one of those fabulous houses.

Long before he owned a 19th century house, he had begun studying and collecting furnishings and accessories of the period. However, his career took him far from the world of historic homes. A skilled pianist, he became music director for a Norwegian cruise line company, and for years, he performed aboard ships all over the world. Still, the dream of owning a Victorian home never left him.

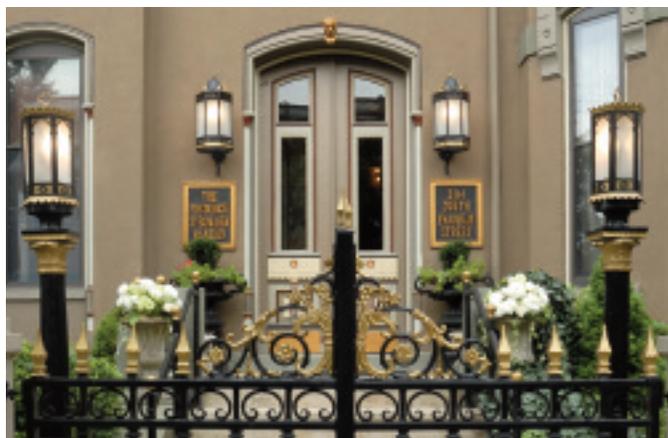
In the late 1990s, craving land and a home of his own, he began researching for a historic house to buy. “It was a long process,” Joe remembers. By then, he was back on terra firma and living in an apartment in the late 19th-century Stegmaier Mansion in Wilkes-Barre,

Pennsylvania. “Even though I had just a small suite, every architectural detail about the entire place—both inside and out—intrigued me, from the opulent woodwork on the grand stair to the moldings and trims throughout the house.”

The house was built in 1870 by a well-known local architect, Missouri Haupt, to live in as his own home. The unique name matched the dramatic and opulent design and architecture of the structure. The architect lived there until 1906 when Frederick Stegmaier, owner of Stegmaier Beer Company, bought the residence for his family. This 19th century business mogul recognized the high style of the house and felt it a match for his position in the community. Stegmaier, a kind of Donald Trump of Wilkes-Barre, reigned over the domains of both his company and his family. It followed, therefore, that when he died, he left the house and all its contents to his wife on the condition that she would never remarry. She apparently chose house and home over possible romance and lived there until the mid 1940’s until she died.

Shortly after, a local businessman bought the house and converted it into an 11-unit apartment building.

Prophetically, among its later tenants was Joe Matteo,



Pennsylvania architect Missouri B. Haupt built the Mansion as his own home. It is an interpretation of the French Chateau style on the exterior, with Gothic Revival and Aesthetic Movement features within.





The Stegmaier Mansion and its gracious hosts have developed a reputation for elegant catering for special events held in their formal dining room, where no detail of a proper dinner setting will be overlooked. Choose from a nine-course Victorian banquet, high tea, cocktail party or formal dinner—any selection will be created by Executive Chef Mary Louise Hepner.



who was in the process of searching for his own 19th-century house to buy. No matter which house he explored as a possibility, he never could stop thinking about the large and generously proportioned house in which he was living. There was no question then in 2001, when it became available, that he would buy it.

Fortunately for Joe, and very unusually for converted historic homes, the Stegmaier was structurally sound. Plumbing, heating, electric systems and roof were all in good shape. The only changes he needed to make were cosmetic and decorative.

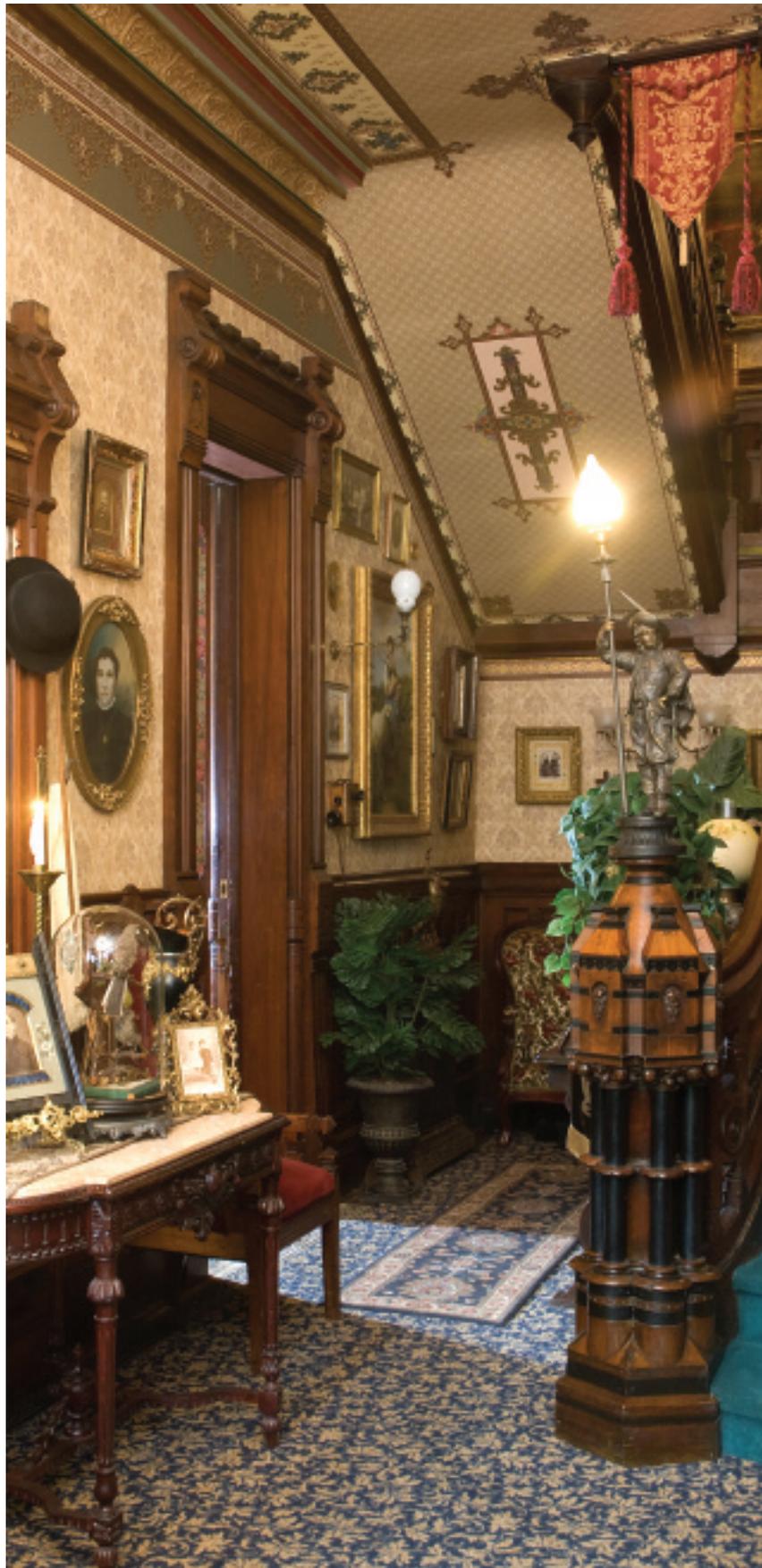
The house became his bare canvas and he did not hold back. Here, his furnishings and art, collected over many years, found a home. Little by little, as Joe filled the rooms of the old house—all 37 of them—with his 19th-century treasures, the house slowly reverted to the grand style of its original era. Each parlor (there's both a ladies' and a gentlemen's), the dining room and library, as well as eight bedrooms, showcase Joe's artful touch.

As anyone who has ever bought a historic home knows, the old places are costly to maintain. Luckily, Joe is as smart as he is creative. As much a lover of all things antique, he is also a businessman and has been able to take advantage of the myriad opportunities

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While living in the Mansion while it was an 11-unit apartment building, Joseph Matteo dreamed of returning the building to its former glory. The grand foyer has been lovingly refurbished with Banbury & Banbury wallpapers that accentuate the paneling below the dado rail.

**Opposite:** The mantelpiece, made from both marble and carved wood, surrounding the glowing fireplace welcomes guests when they enter the Mansion's Gentlemen's Parlor.



his house has to offer, both as a profit maker and also in a genuine desire to share his lovely home with friends and the public.

Today, Stegmaier Mansion offers accommodation in two ways. He offers four opulent suites for bed and breakfast, and four similar, extended stay units are available for people coming into the community for several weeks at a time. Wilkes-Barre is home to two universities and during the academic year, the Stegmaier Mansion becomes home to a number of visiting professors. In the morning, after an overnight stay, one is as likely to be having coffee with honeymooners as with visiting scholars teaching at one of the local colleges.

For Joe, the opulent architecture of the house lends itself to a spirit of generosity; he has taken that spirit and run with it. As host and innkeeper, Joe goes far beyond the de rigueur tiny bars of soap and bottles of shampoo. Each bed and breakfast room offers a basket heaped with anything one could find in their own home bath. A small kitchenette in each suite offers enough snacks to last a long, restful weekend. The mansion and proprietor are both imbued with a spirit of gracious hospitality that epitomizes innkeeping.

Joe and a small, equally impassioned staff give tours of the mansion for both locals and out-of-town visitors. They also plan and create fabulous weddings and other special events. On any given

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The quantity and quality of Joseph Matteo's antiques is breathtaking for a private collection, especially when you examine the kitchen. From the teakettle to the beer steins, from the copper pans to the meat grinder, all pieces are authentic, and make for a wonderful historical documentation of a Victorian kitchen.





Live like the lady of the house for a night or two at the Stegmaier Mansion's Amelia Suite. It is lavishly decorated with a curtained, four-poster bed and an intricately wallpapered ceiling. In the morning, a gourmet breakfast is served in the formal dining room, or choose to have a continental breakfast served in your room. Other rooms available for the Bed and Breakfast package are the Gold Medal Room, the 1857 Room and the Brewmaster Suite.



Joseph Matteo has restored the Stegmaier Mansion with several stained glass windows, and an amazing collection of artwork lines the walls of every room.

**Opposite:** The Mansion's interior was not the only recipient of dedicated restoration. The lush greenery of the grounds are meticulously kept, with elegant statues and fountains interspersed throughout.



evening, guests can wander into the ladies' parlor and find Joe playing the piano for the sheer joy of it.

Joe's executive chef is Mary Louise Hepner, who is also a chocolatier par excellence and operates her own chocolate company. Giving guided tours is Lisa Lewis, fully versed on the history and design of the Mansion as well as an expert on Victorian fashions. Lisa is a public speaker and living history actress who also operates her own business, Victoriana Lady. (See the box below for further information about both of these associates of the Stegmaier Mansion.)

Joe's restoration and rejuvenation of the Stegmaier Mansion has proven to be an inspiration for much of the rest of the town. On the same block, one can see owners of other 19th century houses reviving some of the once-tired buildings. The mansion has become both vocation and avocation for Joe, who had a sense—even as a child—that Victorian life was for him and that this is where he wanted life to take him. ❁

To book your stay at the Stegmaier Mansion, call Joseph Matteo, proprietor, at (570) 823-9372 or visit the web site at [www.stegmaier-mansion.com](http://www.stegmaier-mansion.com). The Mansion is located at 304 South Franklin Street, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18702.

For more information about Mary Louise Hepner and Ah! Some Chocolates, call (570) 674-0178 or visit online at [www.ahsomechocolates.com](http://www.ahsomechocolates.com). Victoriana Lady Lisa Lewis can be reached on (570) 655-8392. For more information, visit [www.victorianalady.com](http://www.victorianalady.com).

# Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania



## How to Get There

**Fly:** The city has its own airport, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport and, with its recently added terminal, operates daily flights from many cities including Atlanta, Detroit, Chicago and Philadelphia. Several rental car agencies operate at the airport.

**Drive:** There are several highways that come into Wilkes-Barre from major cities, such as Allentown, Philadelphia and Harrisburg to the south and Scranton and Birminghamton to the north.

## What to Do

- For history buffs, contact the Wilkes-Barre Preservation Society for their upcoming events and local notable buildings—such as the Stegmaier Mansion. Call (570) 270-4155, ext. 359, for more information.
- Catch a show at the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts, housed in the stunningly restored Art Deco structure built as a cinema in 1938. February's lineup offers a diverse range of shows, from Neil Berg's "100 Years of Broadway" to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic and the Pink Floyd Experience for those into a more psychedelic night out. For more information and tickets, call (570) 826-1100 or visit online at [www.kirbycenter.com](http://www.kirbycenter.com).
- Built in 1893, the Luzerne County Museum celebrates the history of Northeastern Pennsylvania, including the Native American population and the area's mining. Call (570) 822-1727 to find out about current exhibits and opening hours. Admission is free.
- The Sordoni Art Gallery was chosen as the "Best Art Gallery in Luzerne County" by the readers of the Diamond City newspaper, and it houses an impressive permanent collection of around close to 1,300 objects. Discover European and American works on paper from the 17th century to the present, 19th-century European art, American decorative arts, and American paintings from the 19th century. The gallery is located at 150 South River Street, and call (570) 831-4325 for more information and opening times.
- Visit the Swetland Homestead, which contains the original cabin built on this site in 1803, plus the additions that were made to it as the Swetland family grew and prospered, transforming the structure into the elegant home one sees today. Period rooms, spanning the 70 years from the summer kitchen to the Victorian parlor of the 1860s, illustrate changes in living spaces and household objects as America and the Wyoming Valley passed from an agrarian economy to an industrialized society. The homestead, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is open year round with many special events. Admission is \$3 for adults and \$1 for children. Call (570) 693-2740 for more information on opening times and special events.