

sign, originally installed in the 1930s, has been restored. At dusk, the red glow of the "Soo Line" is complemented by old-fashioned street lights lining the avenues to The Depot's main entrance.

—by Lois Albrecht

The Depot is located at the corner of Third Avenue West and Third Street. It is open for lunch at 11:00 A.M., dinner at 5:00 P.M. (715-682-4200)

THE GRANARY

Oshkosh

The sign painted on the weathered limestone blocks reads "H.P. Schmidt Milling Co." But this imposing edifice, a fixture on the south side of the Fox River in the "Brooklyn" section of Oshkosh for 105 years, now houses The Granary. Since opening in May 1984, The Granary has earned a reputation as one of those rare restaurants where style and substance blend as perfectly as the ingredients in a memorable *sauce béarnaise*.

When Henry and Casper Schmidt built their mill in 1883, they built it to last. Squares of limestone two feet thick, cut from an Oshkosh quarry, formed the fortress-like walls; inside, stone-and-mortar pilings shouldered beams of fourteen-inch thick yellow pine. Descending from the ceiling, dozens of grain chutes clustered around these adamant timbers. The mill was in operation for ninety-nine years, producing rye and buckwheat flours marketed under a variety of brand names: the label of one of these, "Honey Dew," appears in facsimile on The Granary's doggie bags.

After purchasing the structure at auction, partners Terry Sweeney and Steve Amato began renovations in October 1983. They'd engineered a similar transformation with The Freight House in La Crosse, but this cavernous stone mill afforded its own challenges and opportunities. As Sweeney puts it, "We cleaned the place up and took stock of what we had." Adds Amato, "We didn't want to change anything structurally; we wanted to do what the building dictated." In keeping with this philosophy, hidden grain chutes were uncovered to brace skylights. Joists removed from the second floor to create a balcony-like effect were used to frame the eye-catching, mirrored back bar, five exposed shelves serviced by a sliding ladder, above which the H.P. Schmidt name is etched in glass, along with the checkerboard motif that is The Granary's trademark. The co-owners did much of the work themselves. "It was the coldest winter I've ever spent," laughs

Amato. "Those stone walls conducted the cold right inside." Sweeney observes, "It was fun, but I don't know if I'd want to do it again."

The fruit of their labors is sweet. Portions of the original stone remain visible, as do many of those massive wooden stanchions. Central to the decor are sifters, rollers, and other antique milling equipment. Amato and Sweeney were even able to preserve a few of those grain chutes. Old photographs of the mill and other scenes from early Oshkosh adorn the walls, along with harnesses from the horse barn at the quarry from which the building's limestone was taken.

The food is of a quality to match the setting. Everything is prepared and served with flair, whether the choice steaks (hand-cut daily by Amato himself), the fresh seafood, or house specialties such as Filet Teriyaki, Tenderloin Oscar, or Shellfish Provencal. A thoughtful wine list complements the menu. Daily luncheon and dinner specials are listed on a chalkboard near the entrance, as are wines available by the glass. The desserts are outrageously fine.

—by Tom Davis

The Granary is located at 50 West Sixth Avenue. It is open for dinner seven nights a week; for lunch Monday through Friday. Reservations are appreciated. (414-233-3929)

THE SILVER COACH

Park Ridge

One of the last things the Soo Line railroad did right in the passenger business was to get rid of one of its passenger cars. When it sold a worn-out coach to the Bablitch family back in the 1930s, the railroad provided the starting point for one of central Wisconsin's best restaurants—the Silver Coach.

The Bablitches cleaned up the car, took off its wheels, parked it just outside Stevens Point in the town of Park Ridge, and turned it into a tavern. It was the first tavern in Park Ridge, a good elbow-bending, story-swapping bar where State Senator-turned-Supreme Court Justice William Bablitch got his first earful of politics as a bartender, dispensing brandy old-fashioned sweets and Point Specials.

The Bablitches sold the tavern to Charles "Pete" Redfield in 1955. He added a rear dining room and made the Silver Coach into a supper club, a broasted-chicken kind of place that was never wanting for customers in the thirty years he owned it.



KIT KIEFER

Eat first-class in the elegant ambience of this restored Soo Line passenger car at the Silver Coach outside Stevens Point.

When Redfield retired in 1985 and sold his place to Jim Gitter and Judée Barsness, about the only thing the old owner and the new owners had in common was their love for the railroad-car/roadside-diner ambience of the place. Gitter had been the head chef at Sentry Insurance's executive dining room, and Barsness had been assistant manager of The Restaurant in the Sentry complex.

Gitter and Barsness overhauled the Silver Coach from the floor up, refurbishing the inside, restoring a stained glass dome on one end and a private stateroom with a pull-down berth on the other (now a private dining room for two, the Glen Flora), uncovering the old-fashioned clerestory Pullman roof that ran the length of the car and refreshing the front bar and dining room. The effect is cozy, sleek and airy in the front dining area (the old railroad car) and pleasantly spacious in the added-on rear dining room.

They lightened and streamlined the menu, too, bringing their own ideas of American food to the place. No more broasted chicken (though you can get excellent steaks at the Silver Coach, and a great Friday-night fish fry). In its place are char-broiled pizzas topped with fresh vegetables and Cajun-spiced, pan-blackened New York strip steak and tender pan-fried veal, topped with mozzarella cheese, served with pesto sauce and a perfectly grilled tomato. Appetizers such as Shrimp St. James (shrimp, mushrooms and scallions served with a Dijon sauce over crunchy, peppery

pan-fried linguine) are attractively presented, and the desserts—including a chocolate selection lightened by vanilla ice cream and strawberries—are positively scrumptious. Service is great and prices are low; most entrees are less than ten dollars and include a salad-and-bread station with a delightful nut bread accompanied by a light orange-flavored butter.

"Something this good would cost three or four times as much where I come from," one out-of-towner said as he paid the bill. A regular put it more simply. "I just love this place," she said. "Who wouldn't?"

by Kit Kiefer

The Silver Coach is located at 38 Park Ridge Drive (Highway 10 East). It is open for lunch Monday–Friday, 11:00 A.M.–1:30 P.M.; dinner Monday–Saturday, 5:00 P.M.–10:00 P.M. Weekdays the cocktail lounge opens at 4:00 P.M. (715-341-6588)

THE FREIGHT HOUSE

La Crosse

When rails were the economic highways and iron horses whistled with power, the Freight House in La Crosse bustled with endless streams of boxcars. Built in 1880, the Milwaukee Railroad building had its momentous days when the nearby Mississippi River flooded or the Ringling Brothers Circus unloaded and the elephants



COURTESY THE GRANARY

Enjoy a taste of the past along with fine dining at The Granary in Oshkosh, a flour mill for ninety-nine years.