



The Tarpon Inn

by Kateri Reyes

photos by Bellezza Photography and courtesy the Tarpon Inn

The first thing I noticed as I stepped onto the front porch entryway of the historic Tarpon Inn was the quiet. It was as if I had been completely transported away from the busy world and entered a bubble of total tranquility. Its grand plantation style façade begs one to reflect on times gone by. Opening the front door into the sunny office I was warmly welcomed by the Inn's inviting staff, and made very comfortable in its cozy seaside cottage atmosphere. My gaze was immediately drawn to the walls textured with pearlescent objects the size of my palm. On closer inspection, I discovered these were the scales of the great tarpon itself, a monstrous fish who has attracted big game fishermen to our Gulf waters for years. The most famous of these fishermen, I learned, was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. While vacationing there in 1932, he signed 32 acts of Congress and exchanged telegrams with Adolf Hitler regarding the devastating Hindenburg disaster that had just happened in New Jersey. FDR made the Tarpon Inn his getaway in good company, with the likes of other recognizable figures such as famous cake mix man, Duncan Hines, and 30's Hollywood beauty, Hedy Lamar. The tarpon fish scales were perfectly mounted to the wall, each signed in meticulous scroll handwriting unique to the writer, describing the size, weight, and date of the magnificent catch. The dates were mesmerizing: 20's, 30's, 40's, including a special framed scale that was signed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself. I knew

then that I was truly stepping back in time.

The Inn itself was built in 1859, originally used as the barracks for the white Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. The event building was used as the barracks for the colored soldiers and the courtyard was the PT & commons area. Much of the Tarpon Inn was destroyed by a tidal wave during the great hurricane of 1919, however, the event building directly behind the Inn was left unscathed and still boasts its original construction, right down to the floor boards and square nails. The hurricane-damaged Inn was immediately rebuilt, and since then, has weathered over a century of American history.

Amiee Van Winkle, event coordinator, gave me the grand tour of the historic property. We left the office and immediately entered the courtyard. The manicured lawn stretched before us, walled-in amidst the back of the Inn and its surrounding events building & restaurant, partially shaded by classic, gnarled oak trees. Again, I was struck by the serenity of the place and the timelessness of the history it embodied. Amiee explained that most wedding ceremonies take place in the courtyard area, and depending on the wedding style and size, a portable dance floor can be commissioned for the lawn space or guests can dance right up on the event building's sprawling deck.



Each building on the Tarpon Inn property has been meticulously maintained and decorated true to the period with turn of the century coastal Americana. Looking across the beautiful space, I can completely envision an event underway. Amiee explained that depending on the wedding package selected, couples can rent the entire property, allowing guests to enjoy the full hotel accommodations while using the courtyard & event buildings to celebrate the wedding. All told, the property is beautifully laid out to welcome any style. Despite its history, it also remains a blank canvas, equally inviting to any Bride, from those who desire to preserve the vintage feel, to the bride who features the most modern or eclectic décor. The light blue wood planking of the Inn, with its white washed window shutters, sprawling wooden decks, contrasted by the green lawn and rugged oaks, all make for a perfect setting to decorate as much or as little as one desired.

The event building normally serves as the dual food & lounge space for most weddings. Its long, enclosed front porch typically hosts the buffet service, and its simple yet elegant interior can be used as a place for wedding revelers to socialize and sip cocktails or gather for the cake cutting. This building will be undergoing

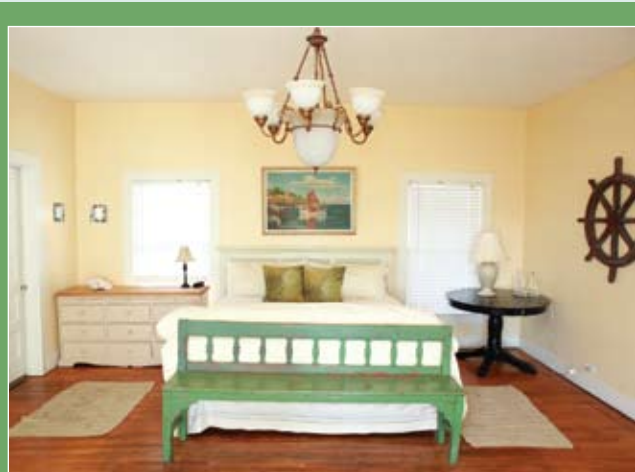
changes in 2011 as they update the furniture arrangement to boast a more upscale lounge feel with couches and high cocktail tables.

Next, we entered the restaurant portion of the property. The building itself has been a part of the property since its origination in 1859 and has been renovated and re-opened as the ultimate fine dining experience known as "Roosevelt's". The tantalizing menu caters to a blend of seafood and fine cuisine & wines, but when the chef caters your wedding, the possibilities are endless. All wedding and events at the Tarpon Inn feature in-house cuisine, but, like all other aspects of the Inn, every step will be taken to make sure that the menu is custom tailored to your tastes and budget - from pastas to impeccable seafood. Although not typical, the restaurant seating space can be rented for large weddings that require additional seating.

On our way back to the Inn, we circled the long, cool pool with its shady cabana. Amiee explained that even this space could be available and customized for a small soiree or can be decorated and added to the party space of a wedding utilizing the whole property.

Amiee stopped at the Inn's front desk to pick up room keys. And no, these were not plastic credit card style access keys, but real metal keys all neatly displayed behind the front desk in an old wooden key shelf, yet another detail that maintains the historic relevance. The Hotel is where the true romance of the property lies. Amiee opened the first room, which she explained is most often set aside as the bridal suite and Bride's dressing room. The ornate, glass-knobbed door opened to a warm living room area complete with a fireplace. This room, Amiee explained, was known as the Franklin Delano Roosevelt suite in honor of the famous guest who had long ago enjoyed its spacious elegance. The living room opened to a beautiful and airy bedroom, decorated in lovely vintage furniture, further charmed by the natural light that poured in from the doors leading out to the balcony overlooking the courtyard. Opening a petite closet door, Amiee showed that its inside panel boasted signatures and dates of countless years of newlywed couples who had celebrated their weddings at the Tarpon.

We continued unlocking several more of the Inn's 24 rooms, each room an inviting



space, completely unique in the selection of elegant, vintage décor within, right down to claw foot tubs, ornate metal bed frames, and vintage armoires. Perhaps what sets the Tarpon Inn even further apart is that all rooms are devoid of televisions and phones. The Tarpon staff encourages their guests to truly get away from it all, focusing on the romance and relationships they have gathered to enjoy. The Tarpon Inn has proudly served as an escape from city life for over 120 years. Staff take pleasure in delivering personal messages from those who wish to contact you from the outside world. Two stories of porches are lined with wooden rocking chairs, beckoning one to sit and stay awhile and take in the coastal breeze. The hotel's quiet charms certainly host a sense of magic, and if you dare, ask the inn's staff about its mysterious ghostly presence! Nestled in downtown Port Aransas, the Tarpon Inn is within perfect walking distance to the town's finest restaurants, museums, marina, and local nightlife hotspots.

The entire staff truly bends over backward for their guests, and when the time comes

around for your wedding or event, it is as if they are preparing for a grand family affair. Great care and attention to detail are taken as they guide you through the wedding planning process. For the destination Bride, the Tarpon Inn staff can give their assistance for seamless wedding planning by offering their best recommendations for local event amenities from flowers and décor to live music.

Amiee said part of the charm of the Tarpon Inn is the ability to return and celebrate cherished memories again and again. Many couples married on the property have returned for romantic anniversary getaways or even come annually for family reunions! Such stories are truly a sign that the magic of the Tarpon Inn lingers in the hearts of those who have been fortunate enough to escape to this romantic getaway!

The Tarpon Inn has been Port Aransas' landmark hotel since 1886 and is located at 200 East Cotter Avenue. For more information on planning your next wedding, event, or just a relaxing getaway, call 361-749-5555 or go online to www.TheTarponInn.com.