



↑ Petoskey's Bay View Inn is one of several northern Michigan properties Jon and Lauren purchased from Stafford Hospitality in 2023.

PROFILE
NORTHERN Hospitality
 BY MICKEY LYONS

How a series of unexpected twists led Grosse Pointe Farms's Jon and Lauren Cotton to own a coveted collection of historic northern Michigan hotels and restaurants



← Hotel Perry is Petoskey's only downtown hotel. It was built in 1899 — just four years after the city was incorporated.

→ Jon and Lauren Cotton pose in their Grosse Pointe Farms home.



PORTRAIT: E.E. BERGER. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE COTTON COLLECTION

Jon and Lauren Cotton did not set out to build a hotel empire. In fact, the Grosse Pointe Farms couple had to wade through a series of unlikely personal and career events, plus a major pandemic, before founding The Cotton Collection, an assemblage of historic hotels and restaurants in some of northern Michigan's most cherished vacation towns.

For Jon, it all started with the Hotel Iroquois. After selling his family's insurance benefits company in 2018, he was searching for a new project. He found one in the historic hotel, which had long enchanted him. Jon reached out to the McIntire family, who had owned the property since 1954, and asked if they would ever sell. "After a couple of years



↑ After buying Hotel Iroquois on Mackinac Island in 2020, Jon would marry Lauren there two years later.

they were ready," says Jon. "It was really important to our family to find the right steward to continue the legacy of Hotel Iroquois, so when Jon approached our family we knew he was the perfect person to take it to the next chapter," says Sam Barnwell, president of The Cotton Collection and a member of the McIntire family. The sale was completed in 2020.

Taking on the Iroquois was a solemn duty for Jon. "The families who own these properties have a deep love and appreciation," he says. "It's like another child for them. So while the price [was] very important, they also want to know who is buying it. And what's the legacy, and how are they going to be treated?"

Jon and Lauren's effort to preserve northern Michigan's heritage includes a \$22 million investment in capital improvements across The Cotton Collection's portfolio of properties, such as the just-finished, top-to-bottom renovation of the 84-room Harbour View Inn. The property consists of four buildings on Mackinac's historic Main Street, the most picturesque street on the island. The main building, The Chateaux, has a two-story porch with harbor views and was originally a home, built in 1820 by prominent fur trader Magdelaine LaFramboise, known as "the first lady of Mackinac." All the guest rooms and suites on the property have been updated with new furnishings and design details.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE COTTON COLLECTION

Renowned architect Jack Barnwell designed the inn's grounds, once a mishmash of smaller gardens. With the redesign, Lauren says, "now the gardens will feel like one comprehensive estate."

Other properties in The Cotton Collection include Mackinac Island's Carriage House restaurant at Hotel Iroquois, Bay View Inn and Hotel Perry in Petoskey, The Pier restaurant in Harbor Springs, and The Weathervane restaurant in Charlevoix.

For Jon and Lauren, the collection of properties is all about heritage. "I want people to come back and say, 'I will come back here every single year, and I'm going to bring my grandkids here,' and then hopefully they'll come back every single year," Jon says.

"Jon's vision was really to maintain the integrity of the properties, not come in and change them and make them into something just to make money," says Lauren. "It's about creating those memories and maintaining the integrity. It's about preserving how the family had built the hotel and

← The Weathervane restaurant in Charlevoix opened in the 1950s.

→ Harbour View Inn on Mackinac Island features four buildings on Main Street.

↓ The Pier in Harbor Springs has a patio facing Little Traverse Bay.



just trying to improve upon it."

The Cottons have committed to restoring and preserving the legacy properties under their stewardship. That commitment is tied to their own families and heritage: Jon vacationed on Mackinac as a child, and Lauren, who returned to metro Detroit after 20 years in Chicago, embraced his love of northern Michigan. The couple reserved the entire Hotel Iroquois in September 2022 for their wedding. They'd dated briefly in high school, then reconnected in 2019 and started dating again during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the time came to plan the wedding, says Lauren, "nothing felt right. Then Jon suggested the Iroquois and it was just perfect. It felt like home."

As a home away from home for generations of vacationing Michiganders, the Hotel Iroquois, along with The Cotton Collection's other heritage properties, seek to remain cherished and charming players in many more families' memories. 🍷