

MARIN

EXTRAORDINARY LIVING

West Marin Hospitality

Is the life of an innkeeper all it's cracked up to be?

By Mandy Behbehani | June 2008



Kelly Emery's funky Olema Cottages enclave in Olema is more like life on the farm.

Eight friendly chickens, three cats, Yogi the dog, and two ducks greet and escort you across the paths as you make your way through the one-acre farmstead to three homey one-bedroom cottages or two private-entry rooms in a renovated farmhouse dating back to 1892.

Rooms, abutting horse farms and pasture, are modestly furnished and have private baths, queen beds with down comforters, wireless Internet, DVD and CD players and mini kitchens. Two of the cottages have woodstoves and full kitchens; Sunflower Cottage has a skylight perfect for star-watching at night. Life is casual with no check-in deadline and no front office.

Emery, who grew up on a farm in Maine and looks much younger than her 47 years, moved to the Bay Area in 1990 and lived in San Francisco and Fairfax before buying her property eight years ago. "I wanted to have chickens and ducks and a big garden," she says. "When this place became available I bought it to fix up and live in."

Four years later, she was thinking differently. "It's just so costly to fix up a property out here, yet I love being here. I decided I had to turn the place into an inn."

Economics also affected her decision to scrap the breakfast service. "We would drop breakfast off at the cottages in the mornings with all this organic stuff and sometimes the food would just sit at the door for hours and then get thrown away. You can keep your rates more reasonable by not doing breakfast."

Emery advises would-be inn owners to make sure they want to live in the place where they open an inn. "Because it's almost impossible to get away unless you're willing to have someone else run the show," she says. "I try to anticipate everything my guests need. Did I give them enough kindling? Did I give them enough towels?"

She stays away from guests to preserve their privacy, although once in a while a guest will approach her saying he or she found an egg on the doorstep. "I tell them Yogi probably found it and put it there as a gift."

Tongue slightly in cheek, Emery says the most important thing in running her property is to make sure there's enough cracked corn in the bin for the chickens. "Because if there isn't, they're at the guests' front doors begging for—and getting—their bagels."

