

Living Light Inn

Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Dan Ladermann and Cherie Soria, Owners



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Overview:

Formerly known as the Colonial Inn, the Living Light Inn in Fort Bragg, California, was reinvented in October 2006 as an eco-friendly lodging venue open to both travelers and students attending Living Light Culinary Arts Institute. Originally built as a family home, the Craftsman-style mansion was converted to a bed & breakfast in the 1940s and is the oldest, continually operating lodging facility in the area. When the new owners, Dan Ladermann and Cherie Soria, purchased the building in 2006, they immediately implemented green practices and an environmental program in alignment with their other green businesses.

Historic Fort Bragg, Mendocino County's largest coastal community, is located on Coast Highway 1, about four hours north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. Dan and Cherie's vision in buying the inn was to restore it to its full majestic beauty and turn the gracious, historic 1912 Craftsman-style mansion into an eco-friendly inn with common guest areas designed for visiting, reading, studying, and relaxation. In addition to the common areas open to all guests, the kitchen provides a communal-style, raw vegan kitchen open exclusively to Living Light students who wish to prepare meals and enjoy a gathering area for studying and celebration.

Cherie Soria started Living Light Culinary Arts Institute in 1997. Not one to rest on her laurels, Cherie has for the past ten years continued to perfect the curriculum of the culinary trainings, which began as a series of shorter workshops, and has developed it into a comprehensive chef and instructor program that far exceeds any other raw vegan culinary school in the world. The curriculum is designed for serious professional chefs as well as ordinary people who are interested in learning how to prepare more healthful meals for their families.

Living Light Center Opens in 2005

Living Light International has matured into four successful green businesses, Living Light Culinary Arts Institute, Living Light Marketplace, Living Light Café, and Living Light Inn.

The first three businesses are part of Living Light Center, a beautiful 8,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility located within the historic Company Store in downtown Fort Bragg. Living Light Culinary Arts Institute facilities, designed to provide the latest advances in raw culinary education, include a first-rate professional kitchen with a sprouting/dehydration room, fruit-ripening room, pantry, culinary studio, and student dining room/lecture hall. Living Light Café offers organic raw vegan cuisine, and Living Light Marketplace features healthy products for vibrant living, including culinary equipment, books, DVDs and high quality organic food items. All three businesses strive to reduce waste by using both reusable and recyclable containers, and conserving energy and water.

The four Living Light businesses employ more than three dozen full time staff. Cherie and her husband Dan Ladermann also produce the Vibrant Living Expo and Culinary Showcase every August, bringing in well known authors, chefs, speakers, and leaders from all avenues of the raw food world to share their expertise with attendees. Living Light is highly regarded as a leader in the Mendocino coast community and has been the recipient of several local, regional, and national awards. Dedicated Living Light staff members follow the maxim "Teamwork makes the dream work!"

Living Light Inn Opens in 2006

Cherie and Dan decided to open Living Light Inn in 2006 to accommodate students attending classes at Living Light Institute as well as conscious travelers to the Mendocino coast. In accordance with the other three businesses' dedication to green lifestyle, including waste reduction, electricity and water conservation, recycling, and compostable packaging, Living Light Inn was founded as an eco-friendly establishment with all organic bedding, a whole-house water filtration system, non-toxic biodegradable and non-allergenic cleaning products, low impact waste practices, recycling, composting and providing earth friendly fair trade amenities.

Program Establishment:

Living Light Inn has been a member of the Green Hotel Association since 2006 and remains a pioneer on the north coast in eco-friendly lodging, to the benefit of travelers who care about their personal health and the environment. At the time of purchase, we immediately established an environmental program and green practices, which are constantly being expanded and refined as new technology advances and the business grows.

Energy Management not only saves money, but it is one of the simplest ways to lighten our footprint on the planet. Living Light has both an ethical and economic motivation in saving electricity, and this motivation is reflected in both the equipment chosen, and the policies of Living Light Inn, which include educating the public to turn off their lights and heaters when not in their rooms.

Lighting has been converted wherever possible to LED (Light Emitting Diode) and CFL (Compact Florescent Light) bulbs over a period of months. Some of the antique lamps and dimmer switch chandeliers have not yet been converted, but conversion to CFL and LED lighting completed to date has reduced our energy bill by 7 percent over the past 15 months. "According to industry experts, lighting accounts for up to 35 percent of a hotel's energy bill." (*Green Lodging News*, Dec. 2008.) Living Light Inn has also implemented the use of outdoor solar lamps, using a renewable energy source.

Heating and Cooling is responsible for "up to 50 to 70 percent of a hotel's energy bill ... (especially in limited-service hotels)" (*Green Lodging News*, Dec 2008.) Living Light Inn is a limited-service hotel and does face the challenge of the cost of running heaters. The lobby, sitting room, and sun room are heated by a propane, thermostat, and timer-controlled heater. The second floor lobby and third floor stairwell are heated by a propane thermostat-controlled mock wood stove.

The individual rooms are heated by 220 or 110 volt electric heaters determined by the electrical outlets in the rooms. We discovered that student guests were leaving heaters on during the day so that their rooms were warm when they returned at night during the winter. In response, we implemented a policy of offering students a service of turning on electric heaters 1 hour prior to their arrival home from school, so that their rooms were nice and warm when they opened their doors.

Because of the moderate coastal climate, cooling is predominately done through cross ventilation by window breeze and the closing of curtains. There are no central or individual air conditioning units on the property. In the hottest months of September and October, we place electric fans in the two third floor rooms. These are only run when guests are present, however, reducing electrical output.

Air quality is also a priority at Living Light Inn. We are a smoke-free inn with allergy friendly rooms. As travelers and students are demanding cleaner air, we are responding with air purifiers and ionizers, pet free rooms, and by using non-toxic biodegradable and non-allergenic cleaning products.

Water conservation and purification are two important components of Living Light Inn's environmental program. Water conservation is most notably evident in housekeeping services. Due to our green policies, we provide housekeeping services twice a week for our student guests who stay with us for 7-56 days (most of our guests) together with on-demand housekeeping services for traveling guests who are staying with us for brief visits. Our student guests, who stay for up to 8 weeks, receive a light housekeeping service (clean towels) twice a week and a deep housekeeping service once a week (clean towels and sheets). This change in laundry practices has reduced our washing machine

usage by 57 percent, thus reducing both water use and electric output from the washer and dryer.

Clean water is provided by a Big Blue full-house water filtration system. Both the tap water and the shower water are filtered. In addition to the house filtration system, the kitchen has an additional reverse osmosis filtration system for drinking water used for water bottles, tea and coffee preparation, and food preparation.

Waste Management has been a priority at Living Light Inn from the start. Since the company grew from a raw, vegan culinary arts school, composting was a natural fit. In addition to reducing food waste, our environmental program incorporates re-use and recycling. In the kitchen, glass and reusable (and compostable) cornstarch containers are used to store food products. Our city waste management district accepts mixed recycling. We have recycling bins on each floor and in the kitchen. Housekeeping staff also breaks down the trash into recyclable and non-recyclable waste.

Goals and Benchmarking:

One of Living Light Inn's goals is to lessen the impact of energy use on the environment by becoming "climate neutral." Northern California's utility company has a program called ClimateSmart which calculates the amount needed to make greenhouse gas emissions associated with our energy use neutral and adds that amount to our energy bill. This program allows eco-conscious companies needing to use electricity from the utility company to balance out these emissions and fund new California projects such as the conservation and restoration of redwood forests and the capture of methane gas from dairy farms. We plan to join this program this winter.

Another of Living Light Inn's goals is to go solar. We have completed the initial research into this ambitious and costly endeavor, including having the roof measured and fitted, receiving an estimate, and working with our utility representative on the sell-back of energy. After all the research, we are enthusiastically awaiting funding of this project. Having our primary energy source be renewable is a priority goal for the inn.

Outcomes and Environmental Benefit:

Because of our connection with Living Light Culinary Arts Institute, many of our non-student guests still find out about us through our connection with the school. Many of these guests are vegan and/or "green" and discover the inn on the internet while researching the school or by subscribing to our newsletter about all four of our green businesses. As our numbers of non-student guests have increased, so have the inquiries about "What makes us green?" More

customers are asking pertinent questions about electricity and water conservation and better waste management.

In addition to conservation, some customers are demanding healthier conditions by staying only at green hotels and inns. The market for customers with hypersensitivities to chemicals and allergies that both appreciate and demand healthier cleaning products, cleaner air, cleaner water and sheets without pesticide residues is steadily increasing.

We have been monitoring our progress in our environmental program at the inn in two ways. First, we have seen the reduction in cost of our electricity, water and waste management bills -- a testament to our conservation measures -- implementation of green programs, and use of more advanced technology.

Second, we have seen a phenomenal increase in patronage during the past 2 plus years since we took over the property. In the last year alone, the number of visitors increased by 51%. Part of this is due to the fact that a majority of our clientele are raw and vegan (which is green in itself). These guests want to have access to our community raw, vegan kitchen. We also provide a student orientation about how and why we've chosen to be a green venue, and how each of our guests can help conserve energy and water, recycle and reuse, and leave a lighter footprint on the planet while they are staying with us and when they travel elsewhere.

Relevance to Travel Industry:

More customers are becoming responsible travelers, transcending traditional notions of environmentalism and encompassing socially-conscious travel. The definition of responsible travel by Lonely Planet is: *Responsible tourism* can be more-or-less defined as travel that takes into consideration the 'triple bottom line' issue of:

Environment: travel that minimizes negative environmental impacts and, when possible, makes positive contributions to the conservation of biodiversity, wilderness, natural and human heritage.

Social/Cultural: travel that respects culture and traditions and fosters authentic interaction and greater understanding between travelers and hosts.

Economic: travel that has financial benefits for the host community and operates on the principles of fair trade.

In response to this shift in customer profile, the environmentalism or the "greening" of inns and hotels becomes extremely relevant both economically and socio-culturally. Today's hotelier not only has an ethical responsibility to care for the planet by trying to reduce its energy consumption, reduce water usage, and

produce less non-recyclable waste, but has an economic and customer service motivation to meet the demands of a more environmentally conscious clientele.

Real World Example:

Living Light Inn has recycled from the beginning. Both traveling and student guests receive notification of the recycling program in their welcome letters. Waste baskets are provided in rooms and recycling bins are on the first floor. Housekeeping staff also sorts the recyclable and non-recyclable items. Despite this effort and the availability of recycling bins, our waste management bill was higher than a residence due to extra trash bin(s).

With the implementation of a new recycling program that placed recycling bins (cost of \$159) on each level of the inn and retraining of the housekeeping staff about recyclable materials, the inn reduced non-recyclable waste by one trash bin, thus reducing the bill by \$17.50 per month. This may not be an exorbitant savings with a payback time of nine months, but the cost in landfill space is certainly of great value. Small changes with relatively minimal cost to the business can make a significant change to our environment. Living Light will continue to strive to make green choices in everything from day-to-day decisions to expenditures like converting to solar power.