

*...French Lick Springs
was one of America's first
destination spas...*



Indiana

WHERE ON EARTH

A Wellspring of AMERICANA

by ELYSE GLICKMAN



AT FIRST GLANCE, the French Lick Resort's hotels and lamppost-lined roadways connecting three shared golf courses have a strong European flavour. This initial impression is a nod to the influence of German settlers in Southern Indiana but a deeper dive into these fraternal twin properties, French Lick Springs Hotel and West Baden Springs Hotel, epitomizes the distinctively American can-do spirit of founders Dr William Bowles and Dr John A. Lane and their successors in the late 19th century. Recent efforts to bring back the West Baden Springs Hotel from the brink in the early 2000s says a lot about the people who took up the challenge to keep it going... and relevant... for another century.

French Lick Springs (known later as the French Lick Springs Hotel) was one of America's first destination spas. Bowles' lavish property and on-site hot springs attracted guests from as far as 100 miles away to soak in the benefits of 'miracle waters.' This prompted Lane to create the Mile Lick Inn, his own equally ambitious hotel, inspired by the popular hot springs of Wiesbaden, Germany, known across Europe for its own grand hotels and well-heeled clientele.

The care and planning the founders put into their respective destinations and guest experiences made the area a go-to gathering place for some of the Midwest's wealthiest and most powerful society folk. Both resorts went to the next level of luxury in the closing years of the 19th century. French Lick Springs Hotel rose to international prominence in the hands of Indianapolis Mayor Tom Taggart, who purchased the property. He expanded the hotel and added luxurious furnishings and marble floors, designed two championship golf courses, and expanded amenities for an increasingly sophisticated pool of guests.

In 1888, Lee W. Sinclair assumed ownership of the renamed West Baden Springs Hotel and built it up into a world-class resort with the addition of an opera house, golf courses, church, ball field, double-decker pony and bicycle track, and, of course, elegant dining in the style of comparable grand hotels in New York, Chicago, Louisville and Indianapolis. In spite of all of this going up in smoke in a 1901 fire, an undeterred Sinclair set out to do the impossible within one year and a budget of \$414,000 US (over \$14,000,000 in today's currency) to make the West Baden Springs Hotel all but outdo some of the grandest spas of Europe, especially with the architectural achievement of the world's largest free-span dome which stretched 200 feet.

The West Baden Springs Hotel, which celebrated its 120th anniversary in 2022, had an interesting existence prior to its resurrection under the direction of William and Gayle Cook, and son Carl (owners of the Cook Group, a medical equipment manufacturer) whose philanthropic focus was restoring historic buildings across Indiana. It served as a military hospital site in World War I, and later, a seminary after the onset of the Great Depression, and a college campus until 1983. After that, the hotel fell into disrepair until the Cook family made a multi-million dollar pledge for the West Baden Springs Hotel's structural repairs and restoration that led to its 2008 re-opening. The French Lick Hotel also benefitted from the Cook family's intervention, and both were joined to become known as the French Lick Resort, now straddling the two towns and being listed on the National Register of Historic Places.»



SERVES 8-10

Potato Casserole

THIS POTATO dish is a perennial favourite at West Baden Springs Hotel. It's so rich and creamy, one scoop is all you need!

Red Pepper

½, diced small

Green Pepper

½, diced small

Yellow Onion

½, diced small

Celery

3 ribs, diced small

Butter

1 Tbs

Cream

Cheese ½ lb

Heavy Cream

4 cups

Idaho Potato

6 large, grated and rinsed with cold water

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper

to taste

Cornstarch

2 Tbs

Water

- 1 **PLACE** the butter in a 2 quart saucepan over medium heat and sauté the peppers, onions and celery until tender.
- 2 **ADD** the heavy cream and cream cheese and bring to a simmer.
- 3 **MIX** the cornstarch and water to make a slurry in a small bowl.
- 4 **SLOWLY** add the slurry to the cream while whisking. Allow to simmer for 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
- 5 **PLACE** the potatoes in a mixing bowl. Add the sauce mixture and stir to combine. Place in a casserole dish and bake at 320°F degrees for 30 minutes.
- 6 **ALLOW** to rest for 15 minutes before serving.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM TOP
The domed atrium of West Baden Springs Hotel; The indoor pool.

The French Lick Hotel now features a casino and theatre, has a wider array of restaurants from modern steakhouse fare to Pluto Pizza, named for the Pluto 'health' water marketed nationally in the hotel's early heyday. The quieter and more laid back West Baden Springs Hotel, in contrast, has a handful of restaurants celebrating the hotel's origins and offering elevated Midwestern comfort food that guests from a century ago would appreciate, especially when crafted with fresh ingredients sourced from local farms and producers. Contemporary, globally inspired cuisine as well as interesting vegetarian options, meanwhile, have found their way into the kitchen, led by executive chef Ethan Smith, and onto the various menus.

Sinclair's, the main dining room restaurant named for Lee W. Sinclair, one of the hotel's original owners, is noted for its menu mixing traditional fine dining staples like wedge salad, pork chops, and Kansas City Strip Steak, Southern items like a Fried Green Tomato Stack with bacon jam, and globally influenced offerings such as Harissa Spiced French Cut Chicken and Thai-inspired Curry Crab Rundown. Although the kitchen was originally conceived to bring a taste of Europe into the American heartland, today it is more about blending an old-school fine dining experience with dishes reflecting the expanding tastes of modern guests. At the reservations-only Table One, tucked discreetly into Sinclair's, small groups can watch the chef and his team through a glass wall partition preparing customized seasonal meal.

Ballard's in the Atrium, right under the hotel's landmark dome, has a 20th-century ambiance and brings something extra to a casual lunch or dinner. The restaurant adjoins Ballard's Bar, inspired by Ed Ballard, who owned West Baden Springs Hotel during its heyday in the 1920s and early '30s. With reservations, group receptions and dinners can also be staged under the dome. Ballard's also serves an Afternoon Tea, with an assortment of finger sandwiches, scones and petit fours baked in-house by a three-person team reflecting the area's German and central European underpinnings.

More house-baked goods are available at Xanadu Coffee & Creamery, along with coffee and ice cream in a sweet old fashioned ice cream parlor setting. Café Sinclair, which adjoins Sinclairs, wears the hotel's unique heritage with pride through such diverse selections as eggs Benedict, generous omelets, Bircher Muesli Parfait, Country Biscuits and Gravy, and fabled Breakfast Potato Casserole.

The three golf courses at the French Lick Resort are a magnet for golf enthusiasts coming in from Louisville, Indianapolis and other nearby cities. The Pete Dye Course boasts its own exclusive restaurant, The Mansion at the Pete Dye Course, with its own acclaimed-by-the-locals menu and beautiful

views overlooking the rolling fairway etched into the hills of southern Indiana. The clubhouse it occupies is also of historic value, as it once was the home built by former French Lick Springs Hotel owner Thomas Taggart for his son Thomas D. Taggart and his family.

Just beyond the French Lick Resort's gates, the family-owned Spirits of French Lick and French Lick Winery houses the Drift Coastal Italian restaurant, which turns out a simple menu with Midwestern spins on Italian-Californian food. However, the focal point is the shared winery/distillery tasting area, which stretches the length of the building. While the winery has produced regional award-winning wines since 1995, the distillery offers an eclectic selection of Indiana-style whiskeys, single-pass Calvados-style Apple Brandy, citrus forward Old Tom Gin, and Indiana's first commercial Absinthe. Those stopping in on the right day will encounter master distiller Alan Reed Bishop, who will offer a pour of his favourites along with folksy storytelling as he explains the distillery's 'Respecting the Grain' philosophy. The shop offers many of the facility's bestsellers.

While Reed is the very definition of local character, a stay at the West Baden Springs Hotel offers its own fascinating cast of characters. Its ownership history and noteworthy visitors such as the Cincinnati Reds, Chicago Cubs, and Pittsburgh Pirates during spring training at the end of the 19th century, Franklin Delano and Eleanor Roosevelt, and Golden Age Hollywood personalities like Lana Turner and Will Rogers, bring a stamp of authenticity to this definitively American destination. 



Click


West Baden Springs Hotel
www.frenchlick.com/hotels/westbaden

Spirits of French Lick
www.spiritsoffrenchlick.com

French Lick Springs Hotel
www.frenchlick.com

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SERVES 2 Seabass with Ginger Greens

A LIGHT and healthy option inspired by spa traditions and fresh local ingredients.

Sea Bass 2 fillets

Old Bay Seasoning

Vegetable Oil
for sauté

White Onion
 $\frac{1}{2}$ small, diced

Garlic 1 clove,
minced

Fresh Ginger
1" piece, minced

Baby Spinach
8 oz

Dry White Wine
 $\frac{1}{8}$ cup

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

a skillet until shimmering. Lower the heat to medium, add the fish fillets and fry, undisturbed for five minutes. Turn the fish and fry for 1-2 minutes more, until the fish is just opaque all the way through. Do not overcook.

3 REMOVE the fish to a plate and cover to keep warm.

4 ADD a little more oil to the skillet and sauté the onion over medium heat until translucent, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and ginger and sauté half a minute more.

5 ADD the spinach and white wine, season with salt and pepper. Cover the pan and allow the spinach to wilt. Remove the lid, stir to combine.

6 DIVIDE the greens between two plates, top with a fish fillet and serve.