

The Rebirth of an **ICON**

WRITTEN BY ELLIE NAN STORCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RARE BRICK

The old Nesbitt Inn opens its doors as the rebranded and restored 21 Broad Street Hotel



Standing prominently on Broad Street since 1872, the Nesbitt is perhaps the most storied inn on the island, holding the distinction as the longest continuously running hotel on Nantucket as well as the oldest structure built specifically as a hotel. The only interruption in the Nesbitt's role as a provider of clean and affordable lodging came during World War II when it served temporarily as an infirmary for the Coast Guard. Now, after 2,604 hours of painstaking historic restoration, this iconic landmark has reopened its doors as the rebranded 21 Broad Street Hotel.





Steve Marcoux, the great grandson of George Washington Burgess, who operated the Nesbitt back in the early 1900s, ran the inn for the past eleven years with his wife Joanne. Marcoux remembers the days when the property was owned by his grandmother, Dolly Noblit, and rates were as low as \$5 a night—including meals. While the Nesbitt has been an integral part of their family history for more than a hundred years, when the Marcouxes realized that the building's condition required a total rehab, they were more than happy to see someone undertake the ambitious project. "Running the inn was a labor of love for both of us," Marcoux said, "but it was clearly time to move on." He added, "It was incredibly meaningful to us that the building be preserved, and that seeing it properly restored, meant that my great grandfather's legacy will continue for perhaps another hundred years."



Originally consisting of seventeen rooms, many of which did not have bathrooms, the two-thousand-ton building was lifted off its crawlspace where a full basement was excavated. According to Geoff Thayer at Toscana Construction, "We have done most of the heavy construction work on Nantucket, and the raising of this building and the shoring of the excavation was as complex or more than anything we've ever done." General contractor Scott Anderson echoed these sentiments: "The existence of an underground river from the top of Broad Street that runs all the way down and beneath the Whaling Museum, we had to create a reverse swimming pool to keep the basement dry, and utilized every possible technique to fend off the forces of nature. Hopefully we did it right."

Giving the Nesbitt its new lease on life are part-time island residents Bruce and Elisabeth Percelay who acquired the property last fall. Bruce Percelay's first restoration project on Broad Street was the Nantucket Whaling Museum. Beginning in October, the Percelays began an exhaustive process that would ultimately result in a total historic rehabilitation of the original inn building, and an ambitious expansion off its rear. Designed by local architect Matt MacEachern and drawing upon a team of historic consultants, restoration artisans, local engineers, contractors and crews, the building has been transformed into both a tribute to historic preservation and a cutting-edge luxury hotel.



The Nesbitt was one part of a group of buildings on Broad Street under the same ownership that then included The Brotherhood and Nantucket Bookworks to its left, and the high Victorian single-family at 19 Broad Street to its right. Originally built by William Swain in 1872, both the Nesbitt and its sister building were high-profile examples of Victorian architecture, which stood out in the largely Federal-style dominated architecture of Nantucket.



To comply with the standards of the National Parks Service in obtaining a certified historic restoration, a mind-numbing level of detail had to be applied to the restoration, including the repair of plaster cracks with a limestone plaster expert, whose methodology was identical to the plastering technology in 1872. All the doors in the original building had to be restored, even if they were ultimately sealed off and went nowhere. The hundred-year-old windows were dipped, stripped, and reinstalled. The handrail, with its mortgage button still in place, was meticulously brought back to life. The wide pine floors and plaster ceiling medallions were all repaired. But perhaps the most spectacular reincarnation was an authentic Victorian paint application that makes the building one of the most distinctive properties in Nantucket's downtown.





Reborn as the 21 Broad Hotel, the new building now contains twenty-seven rooms, full staff quarters, and a series of amenities William Swain could have never contemplated back when he built the Nesbitt. The property now features an elevator, a dining area with a contemporary bottom vented gas fireplace, Apple TVs and iPads in each room, central air-conditioning, and the first ever application of Vitamin C infused showerheads which neutralizes chlorine and soothes the skin. Designed by Rachel Reider of the award-winning firm Rachel Reider Interiors of Boston, the colors are a blend of soft whites, vibrant yellows, and natural textures creating a soothing feel throughout the hotel. To promote relaxation, the rooms include blackout shades that increase the production of melatonin during the sleep cycle, and all guests can avail themselves of the use of the hotel's steam and a massage rooms. To the rear of the building, facing the breakfast room is a 1,400-square-foot outdoor deck with inset pear trees and a central fire-pit.

The Nesbitt Inn has survived twenty-six presidents, two World Wars, a Great Depression, and countless changes to the island. Its restoration will mean that the building will continue to provide accommodations for the next century and will draw visitors to the island to a landmark that has been restored to its former glory and beyond. **N**



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Gary Winn, Broker

gary@maurypeople.com | 508.330.3069 | 37 Main St, Nantucket, MA 02554 | maurypeople.com

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