“DON’T BOther WITH BUSINESS; IT’S TIME YOU SHOULD play; COMe ON TO WATerville AND STAY FOR A DAY.” The words of this early advertising slogan were prophetic for Dave Lundgren, current proprietor of the 1903 Waterville Hotel. A former Washingtonian, real estate investor, and old house fixer upper, in 1989 Dave was headed to Montana by the scenic route; 25 miles northeast of Wenatchee on Highway 2, he passed an extraordinary three-story brick and half-timbered Tudor Revival structure unlike anything else in the town of Waterville. The place was lived in, but hadn’t been operated as a hotel since 1975. Dave figured it should be—and why not by him? He stayed for considerably more than a day, looking for and finding a life experience and new horizons. He bought the State and National Historic Register-listed property and spent two years knocking down walls, reconfiguring spaces, insulating, re-plastering, rewiring, re-plumbing, and generally restoring the hotel’s exterior and interior up through the second floor.

The Waterville Hotel, which boasted 33 rooms in 1903, reopened its doors and ten rooms to travelers in 1996. By 1999, the hotel had garnered the Washington State Historic Preservation Award for Outstanding Achievement, but no single style or period predominates. Dave and partner Amy have gone for “stately,” “eclectic,” and “golden age of automobile touring,” rather than a strict recreation of 1903. The rooms—each one different and many with divinely large clawfoot tubs—offer original fixtures, antiques where possible, and appropriate reproductions where not. The décor throughout possesses comfort, charm, and often humor: many Mission/Arts & Crafts pieces, artifacts from far away lands, and portraits of shyly smiling sepia-tone couples above queen-sized brass bedsteads extend a welcome unavailable at the Holiday Inn. Rooms accommodate parties of one to groups of four or five, and rates are reasonable in the extreme. Free Wi-Fi, continental breakfast, and lively political discussion are all there for the taking, April through October. The winter closure months are replete with ongoing rehab projects.

So the hotel is a destination and an experience in itself; what else is up in Waterville? Just getting there is pretty wonderful—the North Cascades Highway is a spectacular route for Puget Sounders, and the drive up Pine Canyon on Highway 2 from Oroondo is no slouch either. The road winds and climbs through sharply faceted red basalt, and then you’re at the top of the world. But instead of being on some rocky summit, you find yourself in the midst of rolling fields that go on forever—green, brown, and blonde. Waterville, the county seat of Douglas County (incorporated in 1889), is a dry land wheat farming community, there because of the water. An architecturally eclectic American Renaissance style county courthouse with Art Deco addition and a well-preserved downtown historic district will appeal to the heritage tourist. There is also the Douglas County Museum, which started life as a rock collection and blossomed into a great little general museum displaying the history of life in the Big Bend Country from the Ice Age to the present, with an emphasis on the turn of the last century. The Nature Conservancy manages a preserve in and around Moses Coulee with marvelous hiking. Badger Mountain is nearby for skiing and snowshoeing. The Columbia River and Lake Chelan offer water sports. Grand Coulee Dam isn’t far off. There’s golfing, hunting, fishing, bird watching, geocaching, and plenty of opportunity for just hanging out and enjoying the 300 days of sunshine.

The 1903 Waterville Hotel is alive, well, and welcoming visitors from April through October—25 scenic miles northeast of Wenatchee on Highway 2. (Photos courtesy of Dave Lundgren)

For information and reservations call 509-745-8695
or visit watervillehotel.com