

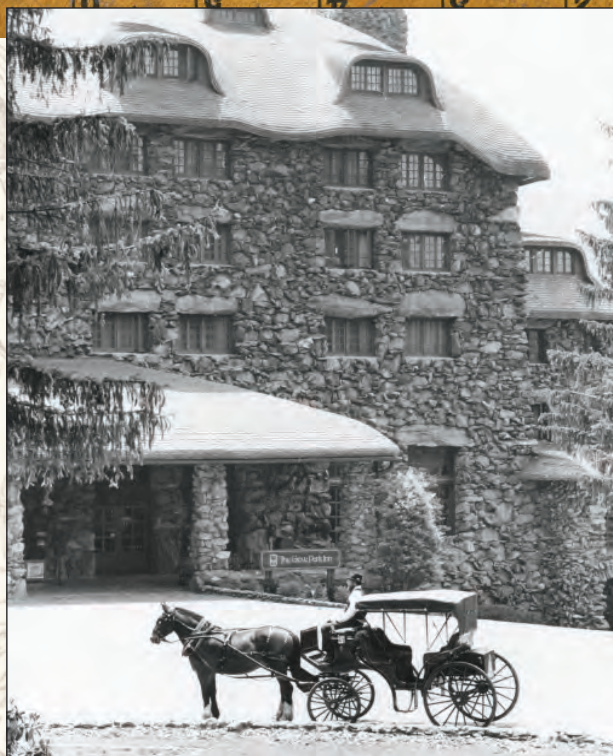
National Gingerbread House Competition

By Sharon Currier



Grand Prize Winner: Jodie Stowe, Polkville, NC
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Overlooking the sea of gingerbread.
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Historic photo of The Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa.
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Baking holiday cookies is a beloved tradition for many. For a select group of extreme bakers, however, baking several dozen raisin-studded gingerbread men is not enough. These kitchen Olympians compete in the National Gingerbread House Competition, showcasing fantastical gingerbread masterpieces that take

months to plan and create.

Held at The Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa in Asheville, North Carolina, The National Gingerbread House Competition celebrates its 18th year in 2010. Each year, several hundred bakers from more than 20 states compete for thousands of dollars in prize money in four categories: Adult, Teen, Youth, and Child. The grand prize winner receives \$3,000, a two-night stay at The Grove Park Inn, and a two-day class at the Nicholas Lodge School in Atlanta with chef Nicholas Lodge.

The confectionary creations do not have to be houses, but they must be crafted primarily from gingerbread, and all decorations must be edible. A colorful collection of candy, fondant, marzipan, gum paste, and even cereal, dried beans, and pasta embellish the gingerbread sculptures. Entries are evaluated on overall appearance, originality and creativity, difficulty, precision, and consistency of theme.

In 2009, the entries ranged from woody log cabins and cozy Dutch cottages to magical, fairy-tale castles. Santa was there in his library filled with books on crafts and carols, and ballerinas performed *The Nutcracker Ballet* on a sugarplum stage. Cultural icons were on exhibit, too, from the Grinch and Snoopy to the President and his family.

Last year, Grand Prize Winner Jodie Stowe of Polkville, NC, crafted a Victorian-style gingerbread birdcage in a tableau reminiscent of the carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The ornate birdcage featured delicate grillwork made from gum paste and two lifelike

turtle doves, molded from marzipan. Marzipan fruit and a love letter made from fondant decorated the base. Stowe began planning her entry a year in advance.

"This is a special time of year at the Grove Park Inn, and the gingerbread houses attract thousands of visitors who come to marvel at the craftsmanship and soak in the holiday spirit," says Heather Brannan, Special Events Manager at The Grove Park Inn. "All of the holiday decorations are up throughout the resort and families come back year after year. It's a real tradition in the southeast."

Visitors to the Inn first enter The Great Hall, measuring a majestic 120 feet across and 24 feet high. Two gigantic, 14-foot stone fireplaces flank either end. Entries in the National Gingerbread House Competition fill several exhibit spaces, and the sweet, spicy scent of gingerbread guides visitors to the glistening displays.

The majestic Grove Park Inn is a fitting venue for the competition. The Inn is nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Asheville, NC, a mountain town renown for the arts and home to many artisans. Built from granite boulders quarried at nearby Sunset Mountain and massive timbers from local forests, the Inn overlooks the Asheville skyline and offers awe-inspiring views of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The Inn was built almost 100 years ago by E.W. Grove, a St. Louis entrepreneur who made millions in the 1890s peddling an elixir called "Grove's Tasteless Chill Tonic." Grove envisioned a hotel that would be like a "big home where every modern convenience could be found, but with all of the old-fashioned qualities of genuineness with no sham."



Many notable guests have enjoyed the Inn's rustic grandeur and warm hospitality, including Harry Houdini, Will Rogers, George Gershwin, and numerous presidents from William Howard Taft to Barack Obama.

The Inn continues to make visitors feel at home, and each year has an especially warm welcome for the creative and hardworking competitors in the National Gingerbread House Competition. "All of our entrants deserve gingerbread glory for the beauty and creativity they put into their works of holiday culinary art," says Ronald E. Morin, Executive Director of Operations at The Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa.

To plan your own visit to The Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa, visit www.grovetparkinn.com. The entry deadline for the 2010 National Gingerbread House Competition is Monday, November 8 and the display will be open to the public Tuesday, November 16 – Monday, January 3. ♡



Judging the sweet confections.
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Adult First Place Winner: Ann Bailey, Cary, NC
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Youth First Place Winner: Lydia Gentry, Hendersonville, NC
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