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# In Their Shoes: Retreat to the elegance of St. Albans' well-heeled past.

by Lisa Waterman Gray

February 12, 2025

**W**est of St. Louis, the small community of St. Albans invites visitors to escape urban life. The highly walkable village, anchored by The Inns at St. Albans, is a favorite destination for weddings, family gatherings, or retreats. Along the hilly drive to the town, dense trees flank narrow, winding roads, and rail fences surround massive horse farms.

St. Albans was once the playground of wealthy shoe-industry magnate Oscar Johnson Sr. and his Southern belle wife, Irene Walter Johnson. As the Johnsons' business grew, so did the town. St. Albans is considerably quieter now than when it was a shoe manufacturing hub but is still home to about 700 people and a destination for thousands of guests each year.



A comfortable seating area at The Lodge invites guests to relax and mingle.



Head's Store has been a community gathering place for more than 130 years. The Lodge, which is part of the Inns at St. Albans, can accommodate up to 40 guests.

The Inns at St. Albans includes The Lodge, the Studio Inn, and several cottages and whole-house rentals. The Lodge opened in May 2021 and features a dozen spacious rooms, where tall doors open to a balcony with lake views. It accommodates small groups, with plenty of enticing public areas, too. Think deep upholstered seating, wood spindle railings, and cozy furniture clustered near a rustic-chic fireplace. There's even a lobby wet bar.

For old-school luxury, there's The Studio Inn. Designed by St. Louis Union Station architect Theodore Link as a summer home for Irene Johnson, the facility now accommodates up to a dozen guests and features gorgeous views of a nearby vineyard and the Missouri River.

No retreat is complete without good food, and The Country Club of St. Albans serves Inns guests and club members inside a massive building with golf course views. A floor-to-ceiling, glass-walled wine room stands just outside the restaurant. At The Golfer's Lounge

and Oak Leaf Bar, many customers arrive in golf gear, while others dress up for dinner. Upholstered dining chairs surround each four-top table and several televisions at the bar offer muted news and sports broadcasts. One summer meal here included a berry and nut-rich salad, luscious fish tacos, and house-made tiramisu.



Opened in 2021, The Lodge, which is part of the Inns at St. Albans, can accommodate up to 40 guests and offers tranquil lake views.



CookINN classes give guests the opportunity to learn gourmet techniques from professional chefs, then enjoy the dishes they create.

For casual offerings, such as breakfast burritos and quesadillas or lunchtime club sandwiches, drop in at Head's Store, where the 1892 ambience and dining area meet charming retail space. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this community gathering place also hosts a book club and seasonal porch parties.

There are two 18-hole championship golf courses that guests can use when they stay at the Inns of St. Albans. For more vigorous exercise and pretty, natural views, hit the paved walkway that surrounds St. Alban's Lake, or check out three new hiking trails that opened in 2022.

If you love to cook, book a class at state-of-the-art cooking school International Choux Co. "CookINN" classes feature a variety of instructors, such as Kansas City-based baker, chef, and cookbook author Judith Fertig. After Fertig's demonstration on this particular day, 12 residents and guests enjoyed a delectable meal as midday sun filled the room. CookINN classes are a delicious way to complete a delightful stay in St. Albans.

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*This Explore article was published in the June 2023 edition of Missouri Life magazine.*

*All photos courtesy of Lisa Waterman Gray.*



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