

THE BALTIMORE BANNER

The Dish: How Peter's Inn turned garlic bread into a signature Baltimore app

Christina Tkacik

7/30/2025 5:30 a.m. EDT



At Peter's Inn, garlic bread is one of the few items that doesn't come off the menu. (Christina Tkacik/The Baltimore Banner)

Thirty years in, Karin Tiffany is still getting surprised by life in her Fells Point restaurant.

“We’ve had to close mid-service for a toilet overflowing because some grown-ass woman put a tampon down it,” she recalled.

Sure, there have been ups and downs since Karin took over Peter’s Inn with her husband Bud on Sept. 3, 1995. There was a 2017 fire that forced the restaurant to shut down for nearly a year, and then the pandemic.

Through it all, the irreverent attitude of its owners — and their crazy good food — has propelled Peter’s Inn from a rowhouse tavern to the pantheon of Baltimore restaurant legends. (John Waters is a fan.)

“We’re like cockroaches,” said Bud, who lives above the bar with his wife. “We just keep coming back.”

It’s here that seemingly simple food is transformed, as if by magic pixie dust. Just take their garlic bread, one of those iconic dishes along the lines of the Greenberg potato skins at [The Prime Rib](#) or the bookmaker salad from Sabatino’s. Thick slices of broiled toast are spread with a divine mix of herbs, gorgonzola and pine nuts, tasting almost exactly like bread dipped in the butter left behind from really delicious escargot.

“I could eat it forever,” said longtime customer Steve Koster. He’s been coming to the restaurant since it was a biker bar owned by Pete Denzer. Back then, business cards for the establishment called it “a no-bullshit drinking bar,” Koster said. “Things used to get raucous and drunken.” It’s much different now.



Bud and Karin Tiffany bought Peter's Inn, formerly a biker bar, in 1995. (Christina Tkacik/The Baltimore Banner)

Karin can picture with clarity exactly what she *didn't* want Peter's Inn to be like when she and Bud bought the business from a friend: "This is going to sound catty, but the owners of Kelly's on Eastern Avenue many, many years ago." The elderly owners, a married couple, sat on doughnut cushions on the barstools, nursing cups filled with ice and Miller Light. They did not get up for customers. "I didn't want that for me and my husband," Karin said. "I thought, 'Oh, I'm gonna be fancy.'"

She was proud when people said the intimate restaurant reminded them of something out of Paris, a city she's never traveled to.

Over the years, they decorated the spot with portraits of Karin's ancestors — descendants of Samuel Fuller, a pilgrim who arrived on the Mayflower. "I think most people think we just really

thrifted really well. They belong to us. They're my family," she said of the austere paintings, which clash perfectly with the Velvet Underground song inevitably playing on the sound system.

But Karin said her puritanical roots left a void in the food department. "I always think, like, what would you do if you're on 'Top Chef' or one of those shows, and they're like, 'What speaks to you? What did your mother cook?' Nothing," she said. "WASPs don't really sit around cooking." Her uncle occasionally prepares clam dip. As a result, Karin takes an unbiased approach to cuisine. "I'm open to making anything."

For the garlic bread, Karin said she perfected another version made by a cook who sometimes rented the kitchen from Denzer. Both she and Bud are protective of what goes into the exact recipe for what they call "Streckfus spread," named after writer Truman Capote's middle name.

Though the website for Peter's Inn lists the spread [for sale online](#), "I haven't sold it in a while because I get a little weirded out about it leaving my premises," Karin said. "Somebody could also go and send it to the University of Pennsylvania and figure out every ingredient, and bam."

Beyond the garlic bread, there are just a few other constants at Peter's Inn, where the menu changes weekly. One is the steak, always finished with European clarified butter on top, as well as Karin's "Caesar-esque" salad dressing.

Peter's Inn's ability to stay fresh while maintaining its core identity has endeared it to many generations of diners. Karin tries to appeal to a wide swath of people with a menu that's "pretty classic, without too much crazy."

"Sometimes we have 80-year-olds and we have 22-year-olds, the palates are so different," she said. "So I want everybody to be

happy and zippy, so it's flavorful, but not overly spicy."

Bud said that changing the menu every week helps the couple stay committed to their work three decades in. "The complexity of our menu has definitely slowly evolved over the years," he said, "and by challenging ourselves every week, it keeps it entertaining for us as well."

Christina Tkacik

christina.tkacik@thebaltimorebanner.com



Christina Tkacik is a food reporter for The Baltimore Banner.

✕

MORE FROM CHRISTINA TKACIK

At the new Pusser's Landing in Canton, you can drink like a British sailor

Jul 28, 2025

Can't travel this summer? These Restaurant Week spots will whisk you away.

Jul 25, 2025