



The Tea HOUSE

One island's trash becomes a treasured retreat.

• JOHNSON'S ISLAND, OHIO •

IT WAS AN UNUSUAL REQUEST, TO BE SURE.

"I want a tea house," Dianne Rozak recalls telling her husband, Dan Thompson, soon after they married in 2002. "We need to have one."

Dianne had been flipping through the pages of a magazine and found an article about a woman who lived on an estate in California. On the property, there was a small building where the woman would entertain guests with elaborate high teas and cocktail parties. The story struck a chord with Dianne, a former caterer, who loves to cook and entertain for her friends and co-workers.

"I showed the article to Dan, and I showed it to my mom," says Dianne, an elected trustee for Danbury Township in western Ohio

and a seasonal naturalist at Marblehead Lighthouse State Park. "They both said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever.'"

But the idea kept nagging at Dianne, and eventually her family supported her dream. Together, they began looking for old cottages that could be moved to her mom's property, across the street from Dianne's own house on Johnson's Island in Ohio.

They finally found it — right next door. The neighbors were going to tear down a 50-year-old cottage on the property that they'd been using as a storage building, but were more than happy to give it to Dianne.

After having it moved to its new location, she and Dan began the difficult task of refurbishing it. "It was just a mess," Dianne recalls.

Opposite left: "I painted this shelf that was originally in the tool shed," says Dianne. "And I found the English china for 25 cents apiece."

Opposite right: Dianne in front of the tea house. Below: To furnish the tea house, Dianne refurbished items she found in the neighborhood dumpster or at estate sales. She painted the tables and chairs green, and re-covered the seat cushions with a flowered sheet. The small, white candelabra on the table, however, was purchased for full retail price, she admits.



Dianne's Favorites

Dianne Rozak constantly experiments with new foods and different themes. But when she wants a sure thing, she turns to the following appetizer and drink to launch a get-together.

MUSHROOM DUXELLES

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped shallots
- ½ pound mushrooms, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ¼ cup fat-free half and half
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped chives or green onion tops
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

Slowly melt the butter in a sauté pan, then add the shallots.

Stir over medium heat for a few minutes. Do not let them brown. Stir in the mushrooms and mix with the shallots. Sprinkle the salt

evenly over the mushrooms, then turn down the heat and leave them on their own, stirring occasionally until all moisture has evaporated. Remove pan from heat and sprinkle flour over the mixture, stirring thoroughly. Pour the cream over the mixture. Stir well and return pan to the stove. Turn up heat and stir constantly until mixture comes to a boil. Remove pan from stove and stir in remaining ingredients. The duxelles can be used to fill hollowed-out mushroom caps and baked at 425 degrees for 10 minutes. The mixture can also be used as a filling for filo pastry triangles, peapods or omelets as well as in place of pâté when making beef Wellington.

SUMMER ISLAND PUNCH

- 5 cups mango/orange juice
- 2½ cups pineapple juice
- 1 cup Triple Sec
- 1 cup dark rum
- 1¼ cups light rum
- 2 tablespoons grenadine

Mix and chill. Serve over ice with skewers of fresh fruit. Makes about 10 servings.

THINKSTOCK

"We salvaged everything that we could."

The couple replaced a set of rotting wooden doors with a sliding glass door, installed a new roof, ripped out the ceiling, added a large picture window they found in a dumpster, texturized the walls and finally painted. Outside, Dan built a boardwalk and picket fence using scraps from another neighbor's building project.

After six months of renovations, costing less than \$4,000, the old storage shed had been transformed into a storybook cottage.

The easy part was decorating it with furniture and knickknacks acquired over the years, such as English china, a bird-seed bucket, a yellow chair with robins painted on it and a rocking chair with press-on velvet hearts.

The rest of the décor was, shall we say, inherited.

"My mom and I would go dumpster diving here on Johnson's Island," Dianne says. "I am confident that if anybody from Johnson's Island walked in here, they'd see something that once belonged to them."

Somehow, it all works.

"It has everything you'd want to have in your house, but you'd be afraid to have, because people would think you are a little crazy or eccentric," Dianne says. "But everything fits in the tea house."

Whenever friend and neighbor Rhonda Sowers stops by, she sees something new. "Everything has a story," she says. "Dianne can see someone else's junk and make it wonderful."

The only things Dianne's Tea House doesn't have are bedrooms, a kitchen, electricity or plumbing. While that can make entertaining and food preparation a little more challenging, she and guests can use the kitchen and bathroom at her mom's house, which is only a few steps away.

"We don't want it to have modern amenities," says Dianne. "It's kind of like a throwback ... an old-fashioned place to sit. When we have evening parties, we light all the kerosene lamps and all the candles and fire up the wood stove."

Friends and family, too, like it just the way it is. "Dianne throws such wonderful parties here," says Sowers. "It's such a great place."

Dianne also heads to the cottage when she needs to work without distractions, especially the grant writing she does as part of her township trustee job. "Half the time nobody knows I'm there," she says. "It's comforting to know there's a place to go where the only 'tweeting' is from the birds." ❧

