Today’s restaurateurs create distinctive spaces by refurbishing banks, carriage houses, and warehouses. This recycling might have impressed William and Clara Kryskill, who harvested ingredients from this region’s landscape to concoct their own establishment in the 1930s.

When plans to operate a hotel in Connecticut crashed during the Great Depression, the Kryskills returned home to Pennsylvania. The young couple initially hoped to open a tea room on an affordable historic property in a fashionable area. Instead, in 1931 they purchased nearly two acres of Moon Township farmland. Although the Kryskills continued to work every summer at a seaside tea room in Noank, Connecticut, they lived in Coraopolis from early September to mid-May, each year making progress on their new home and restaurant.

The Kryskills stretched their summer savings by locating bargains around Allegheny County. A barn and silo near Steubenville Pike purchased for $250 yielded what Kryskill estimated as $5,000 worth of stone, white oak, yellow pine, knotted spruce, and cypress. The wood became the restaurant’s studs, rafters, joists, flooring, roofing, walls, and doors. The limestone and sandstone became fireplaces, a porch arch, and walkways. When downtown Pittsburgh’s Liberty Street church was razed, Kryskill paid a dollar for each thousand bricks he hauled away from the site. He collected leftover gray, ebony, purple, and brown slate tiles from roofer Charles Hahn’s work on a hospital in Oakland, an East Liberty church, and a hotel. When Glenshaw began operating a municipal water supply, Kryskill acquired a used electric pump from a homeowner who abandoned a well. He bought used gas pipes in Oakdale.

The muscle and resources of friendly people and family helped the Kryskills weather the storms, freezing temperatures, and seven years that they labored through to build Hyeholde. Friend Jim Grubbs and his old truck delivered the salvaged wood, stone, and bricks as well as cinders and red dog to fill in the rutted 600-foot road. After the Kryskills blistered their hands excavating a foundation and a cesspool, a nearby farmer plowed two 550-foot furrows into a hillside for their gas lines. When a bank would not assist them, local merchants loaned money and sold materials on undemanding repayment terms. A brother-in-law spent many Saturdays building scaffolding and placing studs. Relatives babysat their daughters.

The restaurant opened in 1937. For lunches and teas, guests enjoyed cream cheese-filled sandwiches, chicken salad sandwiches, pineapple and marshmallow pudding, and cakes topped with an inch of icing. Dinner guests ordered chicken, steak, and (a novelty) live Atlantic lobsters delivered to Pittsburgh in barrels. Success, which the Kryskills attributed to their hard work and ability to please high-end patrons such as a Mellon and an Oliver, permitted more
property improvements. The demolition of Sewickley’s Park Place Hotel provided Kryskill with more façade bricks, cut sandstone for an arched porte-cochère, and limestone steps for a hillside. A road-builder layered tons of slag—the limestone byproduct from the steel mills—and asphalt to make driving up and down hill smoother.

Although Hyeholde’s Normandy-style exterior and medieval English inspired interior design elements demonstrated Kryskill’s fascination with the European past, he also reworked the landscape for future contingencies as well as attempted to reproduce contemporary architectural innovations. When war broke out in Europe, he converted a mine from which he had extracted coal into an air-raid shelter. After studying plans from Frank Lloyd Wright’s mid-1940s hemicycle home in Madison, Wisconsin, Kryskill constructed a “round room” with a south-facing glass wall to make use of the sun’s energy.

The pieces of Western Pennsylvania collected and reconfigured by the Kryskills became the foundation of this perennially praised restaurant. When they retired in 1974, Pat Foy bought Hyeholde, built additions, and increased the restaurant’s capacity. Today, Hyeholde is once again owned and operated by a Kryskill. Daughter Barbara, with her late husband Quentin McKenna, purchased the business in 1991. Although McKenna’s innovative chefs procure regionally-produced meats such as Elysian Fields Farm lamb from Waynesburg, cook with spices enjoyed elsewhere in the world as harissa is in North Africa, and change the menu seasonally, they also ladle sherry bisque into bowls as William and Clara did for their first guests in October 1937.

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