



Murphy likens the dining room to a stage set. "We supply the lights, the food, the drinks, the tables, the chairs, but it's the customers who make the place work," he says.

Even placards for competing businesses, such as the Captain Linnell House, another restaurant in town, are welcome. "I've always thought that competition is good," Murphy says. "And they're my friends."

The Land Ho's menu has barely changed in its nearly 50-year existence: think quintessential Cape fare such as fish and chips and steamers. In keeping with the times, however, the Murphys now serve local brews from the likes of Devil's Purse.

When he's not working on films such as *Moonrise Kingdom* and *The Town*, Cape-based set designer Dan Joy takes on projects for the Land Ho, including painting this sign that advertises the restaurant's souvenir clothing brand, Snappy Attire.

A "Mr. Speaker" sign honors former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill, who decompressed at the Ho. "He had a house in Harwich Port and used to come in on Saturdays for a corned-beef sandwich and a mug of beer," Murphy says.

The Murphys don't like listing phone numbers and websites on signs—it's too commercial. Even still, John Jr. says, "I can't tell you how many people come in here and say, 'Oh my gosh, I was looking for a landscaper or a plumber and looked up and found one.'"

THE HAUNT If These Walls Could Talk

Cool off with a frosty beer and a good story this summer at the Land Ho, Cape Cod's quirky sign-filled watering hole.

By JENNA PELLETIER
Photographs by PJ COUTURE

A PRODUCT OF FLEA-MARKET SCOURING, this is not. It's taken the Land Ho in Orleans almost all of its nearly five-decade history to amass the 400-plus colorfully kitschy artifacts that hang from its walls, ceiling, and back bar. The tradition started in the early '70s, when owner John Murphy nailed up carved nameplates in honor of a crew of regulars he dubbed the "executive board of directors." The men, since deceased, ate lunch in the same seats every day of the week except Sunday, offering Murphy half-serious advice on everything from the serving temperature of the chowder to the volume of the jukebox. It wasn't

long before others who frequented "the Ho" started asking if they, too, could have a sign honoring their name or business. Murphy acquiesced, and soon began commissioning Cape-based painters to create them. To this day, there's no charge for the placards—but only legitimate regulars get one. "How do you say, 'You're not a good enough customer to get your sign up?'" asks Murphy's son, John Jr., who now manages the day-to-day operations of the restaurant. "You have to be very diplomatic about it. So I'll just say, 'Keep coming in, and check in with us next year.'" 38 Main St., Orleans, 508-255-5165, land-ho.com.



Barry Clifford, the explorer who discovered the wreckage of the *Whidah*, a pirate ship that sunk off the coast of Cape Cod in 1717, gave Murphy one of his expired "Whidah" license plates. When Clifford and his crew were excavating the ruins in the mid-'80s, they kept a running tab at the Land Ho.



Also in the mix: family crests representing early inhabitants of Orleans and Eastham.