



The Greenhouse cottage at Winvian

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

Three Greenwich residents set out to create the perfect spots for a weekend escape—and boy did they succeed

by JILL JOHNSON

THE TREND TODAY IS TO GO LOCAL: frequent the farmers' market, look for locally-grown produce at the grocery store, support the mom-and-pop shops... So, why not go local when traveling? Huh? Isn't that an oxymoron? No, not if you take a trip to one (or two or three) of the wonderful inns and resorts owned by our friends and neighbors here in Greenwich. They wine, dine and indulge like the world's top hoteliers, and these spots—in Vermont's Green Mountains; along Rhode Island's seashore; and in the hills of Litchfield, Connecticut—are all easy drives from our town.

FANCIFUL FLAIR

WINVIAN

Litchfield, Connecticut

An hour and fifteen minutes from Greenwich, Winvian is an elegant yet whimsical 113-acre hideaway near Litchfield. The only hard part of a trip to Winvian is deciding which of its unique cottages to reserve. Perhaps Treehouse Cottage, which is suspended thirty-five feet off the ground in the trees? Or Golf Cottage, where you can putt across the undulating floors and

out onto a private green? Maybe Helicopter Cottage, with a bar and entertainment center built inside a restored 1968 Sikorsky helicopter?

I picked Beaver Lodge, a luxurious wood cabin with a double fireplace, waterfall bathtub and authentic beaver-bitten beams. Considering that each cottage is about 1,000 square feet, and contains at least one fireplace, a sitting area, a private porch, a large whirlpool tub and a steam shower, I doubted we could go wrong. Photos indicated that the fifteen architects who designed the eighteen cottages and one suite had done a masterful job. I looked forward to seeing them for myself.

Beyond Waterbury, winding rural roads lead to this country estate turned "destination getaway" in 2007. A gate in the drive enables guests to stop, exhale, take it all in: the lovely white farmhouse; a trio of cottages,

including Charter Oak, built around an oak tree and featuring a porch in a silo overlooking an orchard; a lane leading to a modern spa, all glass and shades of gray blending serenely with the woods behind it; and, beyond that, 4,000 acres of protected land. The gate also gives the

WINVIAN

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(860) 567-9600
winvian.com

RATES: starting at \$650 for two à la carte (cottage, breakfast, wet bar), starting at \$1,250 for two all-inclusive (cottage, all food and cocktails)

what to do

ON-SITE

- Badminton
- Bicycling
- Cooking classes
- Cross-country skiing
- Croquet
- Fitness room
- Fly-fishing
- Games room
(pool, shuffleboard, foosball, darts)
- Guided nature walks
- Hiking (and hiking gear)
- Hot-air ballooning
- Ice skating
- Personal training
- Private yoga
- Screening room
- Snowshoeing

OFF-SITE

(ARRANGED THROUGH WINVIAN)

- Antiques
(antiqueswoodbury.com)
- Canoeing
- Downhill skiing (mohawkmountain.com)
- Game and clay shooting
- Glassblowing (petergreenwood.com)
- Guided hikes
- Golf
- Horseback riding
- Infinity Hall (infinityhall.com)
- Kayaking
- Litchfield shopping and antiques
(litchfieldct.com)
- Mountain biking
- White Memorial Foundation
(4,000 acres of nature preserve and nature museum; whitememorialcc.org)
- Racing school at Lime Rock Park
(limerock.com)

AREA EVENTS

- Litchfield Jazz Festival
(August 6 – 8)
- Lime Rock Vintage Sports
Car Festival (September 3 – 6)
- Goshen Fair
(September 4 – 6)
- Bethlehem Fair
(September 10 – 12)



A delicious creation by Chef Eddy

staff time to prepare themselves, because once guests are within Winvian, they want for nothing.

One of Winvian's tight-knit team greeted us as we pulled up to the main house, and a driver whisked off with our car and bags. No more minivan for the remainder of our visit; here guests are chauffeured around in Mercedes Benz SUVs. Past an informal reception area, a game room with an antique shuffleboard table and elegant pool table encourages guests to relax. My husband declared that the room had the best feel of any he'd ever seen. More rooms at Winvian would elicit the same response. The décor is a mix of old and new, rustic and chic, casual and elegant—almost always warmed by the glow of a crackling fire. Guests are made to feel that this might be their own country home (fully staffed of course).

Before meeting the resort's owner, Maggie Smith, I knew some of Winvian's history: the original farmhouse was named the Seth Bird House

after the doctor who built it and was notorious for making house calls with a coffin in tow; Winthrop Smith, a founding partner at Merrill Lynch, and his wife Vivian, a top Powers model, bought the estate in 1948 and named it Win-Vian; but I had no idea how today's wondrous Winvian came to be.

"The real genesis of it was that I didn't want to see the property sold and didn't want to turn it into a development," says Maggie. When Maggie's mother-in-law Vivian moved to Florida some twenty years ago, she gave the estate to Maggie and her then-husband. "We wanted to keep it in the family in some fashion. My daughter Heather and I started talking. Ideas started to percolate."

Turns out they had a significant head start on good ideas. They had been running the Pitcher Inn in Vermont since 1997. "My house in Greenwich was always the hub—always full of friends and family. The inn was an outgrowth of really enjoying entertaining and hospitality. We used six architects to design eleven rooms. Winvian is the Pitcher Inn on steroids." The Winvian architects were given certain specifications, including a theme with a basis in Connecticut (a zany, crashed UFO idea didn't make the cut). Maggie worked on the interior decorating with Jonathan and Karen Schmitz of Karen's Design in Cos Cob. "Each cottage was treated like an individual home," says Maggie.

Maggie funded Winvian and is the sole owner. Her daughter Heather Smith (who attended Greenwich Academy) is the managing director of Winvian and the Pitcher Inn, and her son Winthrop ("Win," who went to Brunswick), is in charge of marketing. "There's a huge connection every day of the week between management and ownership," says Maggie. Win, while giving us a cottage tour, told us how new staff would be surprised to find him out weeding

under the burning sun. Despite the distinguished lineage (Maggie's father founded Webster Bank), the Smiths have no airs. This is why Winvian feels cozily decadent rather than pretentious. And no question the Smiths are passionate about this place. Win must have given that cottage tour umpteen times, yet he was so enthusiastic as he noted the boulders arranged like Stonehenge in Connecticut Yankee's bathroom, the glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling in Camping, how no cottage bedroom window is visible from another...

Chef Chris Eddy is another key part of the Winvian success formula. Eddy, whose résumé includes Daniel Boulud and Alain Ducasse, has been at Winvian since before it opened. Within the first five bites of our tasting menu, we declared him a culinary genius. "He constantly surprises me. I'm always telling him, 'That was the most extraordinary meal I've ever had,'" says Smith. I believe it. Our dinner, savored in front of a fire in a quiet, romantic, crooked little 235-year-old room, won't

The grounds of Winvian



Maritime cottage



Heather, Maggie and Win Smith



Ocean House views



Ocean House's casual yet luxurious accommodations

be forgotten...ever. The deliciously flakey croissant at breakfast proved the pastry chef could give lessons in Paris. Or Winvian. Cooking classes are offered. "We're partnering with Viking," adds Maggie, "so we can operate as a true catering kitchen for events and weddings."

Brides and grooms have a good time picking out cottages that match their guests' personalities. With some pullout sofas, there are beds to accommodate fifty-

four people (and cots can be added). Some cottages are even dog friendly, and horses can be boarded at a local stable. Kids under twelve are welcome during family-friendly weeks (see winvian.com).

If I return to Winvian, I doubt I'd bring the kids. I'd want another couple's massage fireside in the fabulous spa. I'd want to relax in Beaver Lodge (yes, it was even better than the photos), listening to the sound of the frogs on the pond outside and nothing else. "If I return? Well, Winvian is a Relais & Chateau property. All this serenity doesn't come cheap. Is it worth it? At least once in a lifetime, yes.

NEW GRANDE DAME OCEAN HOUSE

Watch Hill, Rhode Island

For those of us accustomed to beach vacationing via a trek up to Cape Cod and a ferry over to the "islands," Ocean House is a tempting new option. Just over the border in Rhode Island, this grand hotel sits regally on the bluffs of Watch Hill, overlooking the first beach north of New York that is on the Atlantic. Situated on a tiny peninsula, Watch Hill feels like an island, with sweeping water views almost anywhere you look. About a two-hour drive from Greenwich, it has the same appeal of those places with ubiquitous whale logos and stretches of riff-raff-free sandy beach—perhaps more, since Watch Hill is like a sliver of East Hampton mixed with a slice of 'Sconset, but few people seem to know about it. That may change this month, when the opening of the spectacular Ocean House promises to revive this once famous resort town.

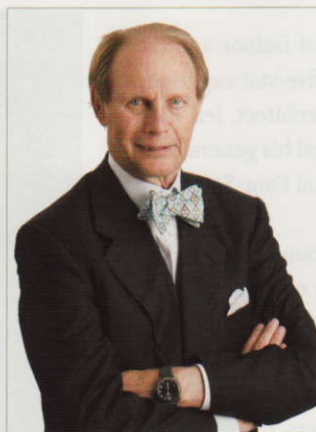
A \$140-million replication of the original Victorian-era hotel that welcomed guests from 1868 until 2004, the Ocean House walks the tenuous line between authenticity and modernity with impressive grace. More than 5,000 artifacts and architectural details from the original hotel were preserved. The bricks



Ocean House



One of the many private residences at Ocean House



Chuck Royce

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from the old fireplace in the lobby were painstakingly labeled and then reassembled in the same formation. The façade remains a warm yellow and the windows are positioned just as they were in the original building. Only now, 159 rooms have been reduced to forty-nine spacious guest rooms and sprawling suites, some with fireplaces and all with water views—often even from the bathtubs. The Colonial décor is sumptuous. The technological amenities are straight out of a futuristic movie.

During a tour in March, I witnessed many of these details, plus more: the Ocean House insignia carved into the railings in the stairwells (“Mr. Royce always takes the stairs in hotels,” I was told); the airy halls (“Mr. Royce hates the claustrophobic hallways in New York hotels”); the unique Tower Suite, which looks like the inside of a tall ship (with décor by Greenwich’s Cindy Rinfret)... I concluded that the owner, Mr. Charles Royce must be a serious hotel guy.

Turns out Royce, who grew up in D.C.

but has lived in Greenwich for thirty years, isn’t a hotel guy at all. He’s a mutual-fund guy who decided to save the soul of the town where he’s had a summer house for the past twenty years. “A developer purchased an option to buy the hotel, and he planned to build five McMansions on the site,” he recalls. “The idea of that just broke my heart. I met with him and bought his option. I didn’t have a plan at that moment, but I felt strongly about saving Ocean House and keeping it as a community-based hotel.” Royce spent a year researching the possibility of salvaging the original structure but discovered “a host of problems,” such as a foundation of sand and support beams that were sliced to accommodate modern plumbing and electricity. “I became convinced that a strong replication would be better,” he says.

Did he expect it to cost \$140 million? “I did not!” Royce admits. Apparently giving such careful attention to preservation, plus adding luxury accommodations, twenty-three private residences,

what to do

ON-SITE

- Championship croquet
- Children’s activities
- Cruises on the 50-foot *Gansett*
- Fitness center with virtual fitness instructors and personal trainers
- Putting green
- Squash court
- Swimming (25-meter lap pool)
- Wine tasting/culinary classes
- Yoga/movement studio

OFF-SITE

- Block Island (blockislandinfo.com)
- Fishing (fly and deep sea)
- Foxwood’s and Mohegan Sun casinos (foxwoods.com and mohegansun.com)
- Golf
- Hiking
- Mystic Seaport and Aquarium (mysticseaport.org and mysticaquarium.org)
- Newport mansions (newportmansions.org)
- Surfing
- Tennis
- Village of Watch Hill (shopping and the nation’s oldest flying-horse carousel, visitwatchhill.com)
- Watch Hill Lighthouse and Museum (lighthouse.cc/watchhill)

HOTEL EVENTS

- Art shows throughout the year (in addition to the hotel’s rotating multimillion dollar art collection)
- Croquet tournaments
- Show Your Cause, a designer show house fundraising event (June 8 – 22)
- Trunk shows

a 12,000-square-foot spa, 10,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, and a team that can deliver a five-star experience doesn't come cheap. Royce gives credit to his architect, Jeff Riley, "the mastermind of the architectural details," and his general manager, Daniel Hostettler, who came from the Mobil Four-Star Lajitas resort in Texas.

The executive chef, Albert Cannito, also came from Lajitas, where he specialized in cooking farm-to-table cuisine and using local ingredients. He will carry over this approach to Ocean House, with ingredients coming from the sea, the resort's own ten-acre farm and herb garden, and local farmers. Food forager Pamela Stone will escort hotel guests to meet local farmers, fishermen, and cheese and wine makers, as part of the hotel's Culinary Education program. Wine weekends will give budding vintners a chance to create their own wine, from selecting the flavor to designing the label.

"We aspire to be one of the top four or five resorts in New England within the first year," says Royce. "The overall experience will be just fabulous."

The gentleman is persuasive. My husband and I had planned to return to Nantucket, where we were married a decade ago, for our anniversary in August. Instead we will be booking a room at Ocean House—which, by the way, is also a beautiful place for a wedding.



An aerial view of the Rhode Island coast

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
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The Sammis family

Right: Quiet beauty at Three Stallion Inn



GREENER PASTURES

THREE STALLION INN

Randolph, Vermont

The Three Stallion Inn, nestled into the Green Mountains in Central Vermont, is about four hours from Greenwich. My husband and I stopped for an afternoon of skiing on the way up to the inn, which is conveniently located halfway between Killington and Stowe. During the forty-five-minute drive from Killington to charming Randolph, the woods deepen and the population thins. In a mild March, trickling water whispers under the snow. Big-city stress melts away. Up here, by the way, "big city" is a state capitol of 8,000 people.

The Three Stallion Inn came into view just as the sun spread a pre-dusk orange blanket over the rolling mountains. The rambling old white farmhouse sits at the heart of a nature lover's paradise. A wraparound veranda invites guests to marvel at the surrounding 1,300-acre Green Mountain Stock Farm. Across the street and down a gentle hill is the golf course, a cross-country skier's heaven in the winter, with the majestic mountains as a backdrop. Framing the inn are pastures where horses once grazed, bordered by the woods that hide tennis courts and a maze of trails. By a white barn, a frozen natural fountain (so tall that a few ice climbers pondered an ascent) hovers in the air like a magically suspended waterfall playing freeze dance. This is a special

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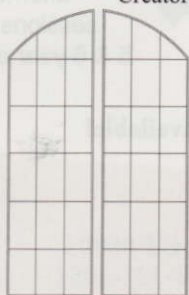
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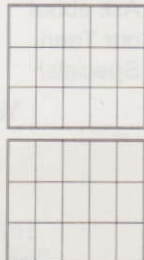
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what to do

ON-SITE

- Biking
- Cross-country skiing
- Fishing
- Fitness room
- Golf
- Hiking
- Snowshoeing
- Swimming
- Tennis
- Volleyball

OFF-SITE

Ben & Jerry's factory tours
 (benjerry.com)

Biking
 (Randolph Vermont Biking Routes, a guide to 500 miles of trails, is available at the inn)

Billings Farm & Museum
 (billingsfarm.org)

Downhill skiing
 (stowe.com, killington.com, suicide6.com)

Golf
 (see golfvt.net)

Horseback riding
 (roughterrainfarm.com)

Montshire Museum of Science
 (montshire.org)

Quechee Gorge
 (vtstateparks.com)

Town of Randolph
 (shopping, dining and Chandler Center for the Arts, randolphvt.com, chandler-arts.org)

Vermont Toy & Train Museum
 (quecheegorge.com)

INN EVENTS

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Three Stallion Inn's sprawling property

place. And if it weren't for Greenwich's own Sam Sammis, I may have been looking at a grid of 2,600 homes.

Sammis, who grew up in Greenwich, was working at an investment bank in New York when he discovered the Green Mountain Stock Farm—a defunct horse farm where Vermont's beautiful Morgan horses were bred for years (and possibly saved from extinction). "I went up as a consultant to take a look." It was 1971 and the interstate that passes the farm had just gone in, rendering the pristine spot easily accessible. "I called my wife, Jinny—who is also my business partner—and told her I saw some exceptional long-range value here." Never mind the pigs and chickens wandering about the rundown farmhouse.

Wisely, Sammis enlisted land planner Garfield Langworthy. "We could have divided the land into half-acre lots, but he suggested doing sites of ten acres or more, with the inn as the focal point. Leaving 600 acres of open fields, we could preserve this beautiful farm and strike a balance between development and conservation." The twenty-five homes that have been built are discreetly tucked away into the woods. Their owners have access to the twenty-three miles of trails that guests enjoy for hiking, biking, horsback riding, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. "That was another key: no noisemakers on our trails," says Sammis.

Sammis had no background in hotels,

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and the inn grew from a series of serendipitous circumstances. After he bought the property, a friend, U.S. Olympian Nordic skier Kim Mumford, asked to house-sit while attending Vermont Technical College. Her boyfriend (now husband) and fellow Olympian Bob Gray moved in and they opened a ski touring center, with lodging for ten. During the first winter, a skier heading home from Stowe got stranded in a blizzard. "A guy at the Mobil station directed him to the inn, where he watched Kim and Bob doing everything: cooking, serving (at the dining table in the kitchen), stoking the fire, preparing skis for the next day. He was fascinated and ended up staying another night." Turns out he was a travel writer for the *New York Times*. A front-page story on the unknown gem in Vermont appeared a week later. "That was really the start of the inn," says Sammis.

Today the inn retains a homey B&B feel, but now guests dine at Morgan's Pub or Lippitt's Restaurant, not in the kitchen. The extensive menu has a local focus (my favorite: the appetizer of Vermont artisanal cheeses with cranberry compote and grilled flatbread). The inn has a game room and exercise room—nothing fancy, just fun and functional. The whirlpool tub does the trick after a nice hike. The antique décor and sloping floors in the guest rooms add character, while renovated bathrooms feature heated floors and steam showers. In a nook on the top floor, a massage table awaits fatigued athletes. But, the emphasis here clearly is on the "sporting life" and enjoying the great outdoors, not prima donna pampering.

Three years ago, Sammis began managing the inn personally. Sammis's son Jesse and his daughter-in-law Paige, and his daughter Suzanne Cabot and her husband Jim—all Greenwich residents—are involved in marketing the inn. "It's a real family venture," says Sammis, who loves to see his kids and grandkids enjoying the inn and aims to make it a "fun and affordable" spot for families. As we discovered, the Three Stallion Inn also makes for a refreshing couple's getaway. 



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