

Cocoon in luxury at The Manor on Golden Pond

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE DECEMBER 2, 2011



The Manor on Golden Pond offers turn-of-the-century decor, and almost all rooms have a wood-burning fireplace.

Photograph by: The Manor on Golden Pond, The Manor on Golden Pond

The 1981 film *On Golden Pond* earned Academy Awards for actors Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn and screenwriter Ernest Thompson, plus a nomination for Jane Fonda, but another starring attraction was the gorgeous New Hampshire landscape of lake, loons and forests.

At the heart of this land of bushy mountains and clear waters is the stately Manor on Golden Pond, a hilltop hotel with fine dining, luxurious antique-style rooms and those Oscar-worthy, majestic views. The Lakes Region of New Hampshire is busier in summer, what with boating, hiking and fishing, but it is highly appealing in winter, too, with lots of snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and country-store shopping. At the Manor itself, you can cocoon at the Seasons Spa with a maple-infused body wrap or choose a fireplace and settle in with a book, a jig-saw puzzle or chess game. The inn also is having a New Year's Eve special and runs creative cooking classes from January to May.

Let's set the record straight about the movie. There is no Golden Pond. The film was an ode to an idyllic place that captured a slice of rural beauty and was mostly shot on Squam Lake, N.H., where Ernest Thompson lives. And the house in the movie is the fictional summer cottage that we all yearn to have, lovingly lived-in and complete with a private dock and a nice family.

But you won't miss that house. The Manor on Golden Pond is much more accommodating and much more luxurious. It takes its name from the movie because it overlooks picturesque Squam Lake, a.k.a. Golden Pond. The butterscotch-coloured house is a blend of styles. It feels like a posh, vintage inn with 15 spacious guest rooms in the main lodge, furnished in antique style with warm fabrics of paisley, floral and plaid, and fancy bathrooms. It also is an upscale country hotel with more than a hint of grandeur and several exceptionally private suites scattered on the property.

"I call it a boutique hotel," said Mary Ellen Shields, who owns the inn with her husband, Brian. "It's not big, but it has hotel-style services."

Perhaps we could say a boutique hotel with turn-of-the-century architecture and decor and a mix of Old England and New England features. The original manor was built in the Tudor style in the early 1900s by a rich Englishman for his young fiancée, and no expense was spared to spoil her and have a suitable venue for parties and house guests. The large windows are leaded, the corridors are wide enough for ladies wearing ball gowns, the walls are of mahogany and the inn's 22 wood-burning fireplaces are surrounded by marble and finely carved wooden mantels.

The Shields have added the

Seasons Spa, the M Bistro (open in summer) and deluxe amenities like fine sheets by Frette of Italy, down pillows, bathrobes, expensive Occitane toiletries from France, pod coffee machines, evening turndown and televisions with an impressive 40 channels.

The manor has kept its British accent intact. That most enduring of English rituals, afternoon tea, is served at 4 p.m. in delicate Royal Doulton china cups, with little sandwiches – correctly presented with crusts cut off. Several of the staff are interns from England, so you will meet Callum from Oxford, who whisks away your luggage; Henry from Cornwall, who lights the fireplaces; and Catherine from Fleet, who serves dinner.

Keeping the theme, all of the guest rooms are named after English counties and are filled with period furniture and antique lamps, wall sconces and other accessories. The Avon, popular as a honeymoon suite, is a vision in blue toile decor. The Windsor sports an impressive four-poster bed. The Stratford's

suite, is a vision in blue toile decor. The Windsor sports an impressive four-poster bed. The Stratford's pine wall paneling is woodsy and masculine. To me, the main attraction is that almost all of the accommodations have their own wood-burning fireplaces, a special touch in winter, and one that you won't want to leave.

After a glass of bubbly or a vintage scotch in the Three Cocks Pub, it's onto a formal, fireside dinner of dishes like quail, smoked salmon, duck breast, mushroom risotto or beef tenderloin. An elaborate New Year's Eve feast will add such delicacies as oysters, lobster in pastry, sweetbreads and filet mignon.

The Manor's cooking classes are sociable sessions led by chef Peter Sheedy, who attended McGill University and the New England Culinary Institute. Soup Strategies in January will explore lobster bisque, appleceliac potage and chili. The Breakfast in Bed session in February focuses on sensual temptations like eggs Benedict, omelettes with caviar and crepes with strawberries. If you are truly a novice, the How to Boil Water workshop in March conquers braised chicken with mushrooms and gnocchi and crème brûlée. Perhaps you have mastered cooking with wine and are ready for the Craft Beer class in May, which uses micro-brews to flavour cheddar soup and marinated hanger steak.

Rochelle@rochellelash.com

IF YOU GO

The Manor On Golden Pond, 800-545-2141, 603-968-3348, manorongoldenpond.com; 31 Manor Drive, Route 3, Holderness, N.H.; welcomes guests aged 12 and over. Closed March 26 - April 12.

Prices include full breakfast, afternoon tea, wireless Internet, DVD library. In summer, there is a heated swimming pool, one clay tennis court, croquet and horseshoes. Four categories of rooms and suites, \$220-\$550, U.S. for two. Dinner, \$35-50 p.p. Packages available with New Year's Eve, Seasons Spa, downhill skiing at Waterville Valley and boating in summer.

Cooking classes: a two-night package with breakfast and dinner on both days costs \$650 -\$1,100 U.S. for two people, including morning cooking workshops, closing lunch and recipe book for one student. Add \$75 for a second cooking participant. Schedule: Soup Strategies, Jan. 20-22; Breakfast in Bed, Feb. 24-26; How to Boil Water, March 16-18; Craft Beer Cooking, May 4-6.

Lakes Region Tourism Association, N.H.: 800-60- LAKES/605-2537, lakesregion.org.

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette