

# Checking In: New Hotel Vermont woodsy and trendy

## Farm-to-table cocktails and yoga classes make boutique property a hip venue

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JULY 25, 2013



Juniper, the bistro-bar at Hotel Vermont, serves casual fare and carbon-negative cocktails.

**Photograph by:** Hotel Vermont

I have heard of hand-thrown pottery, cask-aged beer and homespun clothes. On a larger scale, I recently experienced the new Hotel Vermont in Burlington, an artisan project from furniture to food.

Burlington's first contemporary boutique property, the Hotel Vermont opened this year with a singular dedication to regional products, individual craftsmanship and eco-consciousness.

Those aspects are tributes to Vermont's rural roots, but this exciting establishment is also highly progressive, with radio frequency touch-card door locks, energy-saving lights that turn off when you're not there and Internet access at 100 megabytes-per-second — double or triple the speed offered at most other hotels.

Burlington has always been a pleasant getaway, but this new hotel is Burlington's first Vermont-chic venue, with its stylish decor and hip on-site bar-bistro, Juniper. The hotel also has drop-in yoga classes and carbon-negative cocktails. (That means the ingredients are local and cultivated without any negative impact on the environment. No guarantee about the hangover, though.) And a major bulletin for gourmets: A branch of the esteemed Hen of the Wood restaurant of Waterbury, Vt., will open in the hotel sometime around Labour Day.

Local to the core, Hotel Vermont has 125 rooms and suites in a newly constructed building created by two Burlington companies. Smith Buckley Architects and TruexCullins Architecture & Interior Design both executed the project with work done by local masons, blacksmiths and carpenters.

It's a darling of design, a lighthearted mix of rustic materials and trendy urban minimalism. The hotel is a six-storey block of glass, brick and stone on the outside — on the inside, it's a collage of granite walls and repurposed oak floors, with accents of metal, slate and concrete. The contrasts are amusing: Ferns sprout from maple syrup buckets, a wooden barn door slides open to reveal a stylish party room, the coffee tables are tree trunks and the signature artwork is a contemporary sculpture fashioned out of salvaged wood by Vermonter Duncan Johnson.

The guest rooms also represent the marriage of modern simplicity with old-fashioned country warmth. They are spacious and airy, each equipped with a work desk, an ergonomic chair and a platform bed topped with white-on-white striped sheets.

But this is no ubiquitous Zen-style chamber. Even within the contemporary setting, guests experience rustic Vermont through plaid blankets from Johnson Woolen Mills, cosy bathrobes from the Vermont Flannel Co. and sturdy coffee mugs handcrafted by potter Robert Compton. The glass shower is stocked with products made of honey, beeswax and aromatic herbs from Lunaroma in Burlington. Do you like your hotel amenities? You can take home your entire experience. Everything — pyjamas, soap, body lotion — is for sale.

The hotel's spaces flow from one to another, with the ground floor designed for gathering. Turn right from the small lobby and you settle into a living room with a fireplace, low-rise sofas and a 10-person ottoman — all perfect for meeting and greeting. My favourite space on a hot summer night is the Juniper terrace, where lounging couches and a firepit create a moonlit hangout for dessert, drinks and conversation.

At the centre of all this socializing is Juniper, a cocktail bar and bistro with traditional seating for two or four, plus a communal table and a singles counter where you can chat with your neighbour — or not. Juniper has been an instant hit with both locals and hotel guests for its farm-to-table casual food and connoisseurs' choice of craft beer, organic wines and Vermont spirits like Green Mountain Organic Vodka and rum from Smugglers' Notch Distillery.

Juniper's executive chef, Doug Paine, says he is doing "new Vermont cuisine with traditional ingredients." A blackboard lists about 50 local suppliers including Butterworks Farm, Arethusa Farm and Pete's Greens, all organic producers of vegetables and dairy, as well as Templeton Farm which raises grass-fed beef. The new summer menu features bar snacks like cheddar fritters and carefully crafted dishes including squash risotto with truffled honey, roast pheasant with sour cherries and garlic, beef with cilantro cabbage slaw, pan-seared wild salmon, lamb meatballs with harrisa and yogurt, and goat cheese gnocchi with foraged mushrooms. With a nod to Montreal, Paine also serves poutine and smoked turkey sandwiches.

Hearty breakfasts are a Vermont tradition, and Paine goes all out with dishes like pancakes topped

with blueberries, crème fraîche and maple syrup; French toast with apple compote; and sides such as red flannel hash, smoked bacon and thick yogurt with hazelnut granola.

When I visited in June, Hotel Vermont's second restaurant, Hen of the Wood, had sadly not yet opened. Already established with a top reputation in Waterbury, near Stowe, Hen of the Wood is sure to become the hottest table in Burlington. With a wood-fired oven and wood-fired grill, its signature cooking style is that "everything touches fire at some point."

Enough food. Hotel Vermont also lends out recycled bicycles provided by Old Spokes Home, a shop that specializes in vintage wheels. The Burlington Bike Path meanders north for about 11 kilometres along the Lake Champlain shore to Colchester and Malletts Bay. Long-haulers can connect to the Island Line Trail and take a ferry to South Hero, one of the Lake Champlain Islands.

## IF YOU GO

Burlington is a 90-minute drive from Montreal via Autoroute 10 east to exit 22, routes 35 and 133 to the U.S. border, and Highway 89 south.

Hotel Vermont: 855-650-0080 or 802-651-0080, [www.hotelvt.com](http://www.hotelvt.com); 41 Cherry St., Burlington, Vt.

Price: \$269-\$349 U.S. per day, incl. coffee corner, fitness room; indoor self-parking, \$8, or valet, \$12; electric vehicle plug-in is free; pet-friendly, \$30 a day.

Juniper: 802-651-5027, [www.hotelvt.com](http://www.hotelvt.com); daily for breakfast, plus 4 p.m. bar snacks and dinner.

Hen of the Wood: 802-244-7300 (Waterbury), [www.henofthewood.com](http://www.henofthewood.com); 55 Cherry St., Burlington; dinner nightly; opening date, TBA.

Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce: 802-863-3489, [vermont.org](http://vermont.org).

Burlington Parks & Bike Path: 802-864-0123, [www.enjoyburlington.com](http://www.enjoyburlington.com).

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The writer was a guest of the hotel. The hotel did not review or approve the story.

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