

# Checking In: Revamp enhances charms of Topnotch Resort

Stowe, Vt., lodge is A-list destination

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 9, 2013 8:02 AM



The revamped Topnotch Resort facing Mount Mansfield in Stowe, Vt., has reopened with new décor and new features.

**Photograph by:** Topnotch Resort

‘The same, only better,’ said general manager Aaron Black, when I asked about the restructured Top-notch Resort, which reopened in June after a thorough, \$15 million overhaul.

I couldn’t be more thrilled. I would like this posh country lodge always to stay the same, at least the broad strokes.

Developed to A-list status by a Montreal family, Top-notch had virtually dominated the upper echelon of lodging in Stowe for more than 30 years. It was prized for its warmth, fine food, deluxe guest rooms, superior swimming pools (one reserved for adults) and expansive grounds with views of Mount Mansfield.

Gee, Topnotch even has its own horseback-riding stable and sleigh rides, which gives it

immeasurable charm. Then, there is the indoor-outdoor tennis club, so comprehensive that international tournaments have been held here.

And the Topnotch Spa is arguably the finest resort spa in the northeast. Topnotch consistently offers exceptional treatments, progressive fitness classes and an inner sanctum of steam rooms and baths.

Habituéés of Stowe can relax. Those features still are going strong. But, what was modern and upscale at Topnotch in the 1980s and 1990s has been updated under new owners, particularly in the domain of décor and cuisine.

The 68 hotel rooms, spacious and serene, have been redone with understated contemporary décor. The furniture — a mellow café-au-lait colour — has clean lines, and the beds are covered in white, with a rustic accent of plaid headboards. But there is much more.

Guests drive up to an ultracontemporary pavilion of natural cedar, park under a sweeping portico and toss the keys to a valet. Then, they enter Topnotch's new world.

One building has disappeared, and with it, Maxwell's dining room, The Buttertub Lounge, the gift shop and the living room with the moose head above the fireplace. That is all history — except for one stone wall that is part of an outdoor garden and patio area.

The interior of the new entrance building is a modern, sleek collage of dark walnut, slate, sheet metal and glass framing a small lobby and concierge area. Look left and you will see The Roost, an all-new, casual bistro and the marquee attraction of the new Topnotch.

Topnotch always has been a social hub. It has class, location and a desirable clientele, so it is popular for après-sports drinks, lunch and dinner.

The Roost is young in style and spirit, but it is meant to be the resort's cool, grown-up venue. Here, patrons perch, sip and nibble, while gazing through a wall-sized window at Mount Mansfield. You can choose your zone to match your mood. There are large-screen TVs, lounging sofas around a fireplace, high-topped tables, window seats and an outdoor patio with a firepit.

At The Roost, Topnotch's executive chef Steve Sicinski concentrates on what he calls "the best of comfort food." The lunch menu features artisan charcuterie and sausages, Vermont cheeses, deluxe burgers and sandwiches. This expands at night with a small-but-delectable choice of skirt steak, roast chicken and veal meatballs.

At the bar, master mixologist Kevin Chap blends such seasonal cocktails as the strawberry-rhubarb margarita and the Beehive, made with muddled ginger and lemon, vodka and a honeycomb. The Roost has 10 American micro-brews and tantalizing bar snacks like wings, kale bruschetta or pork-belly tacos.

Topnotch has gone informal even at the former Norma's. The dining room has been renamed Flannel and it's the place for generations of families to get together with a children's menu and deluxe casual

cuisine for grown-ups. During the day — at table, patio or pool — Flannel serves flatbreads, designer sandwiches and salads. At dinner, chef de cuisine Cortney Quinn cooks up such classics as crab fritters, gnocchi, chicken, steak, duck confit and salmon. The burger is topped with Vermont cheddar and crispy pork belly; the Caesar salad is tossed with kale. The darling desserts suggest we are all kids at heart: cheesecake laced with peanut butter and chocolate, peach Melba smothered in whipped cream, brownies and a Cookie Monster.

Topnotch is a full-scale resort, which means that it has something for everyone, especially youngsters, including a video-game room and baby gear. The Junior Tennis Academy trains champions-to-be, aged 3 to 14. The spa offers teen treatments and a beauty package for mother and daughter.

This resort also is pet-friendly, offering afternoon treats and doggie turndown. The spa lists a Rover Reiki massage during which your pet will be pampered by a specially trained therapist in your room. Concierges Carol Crawford and Mary Slayton even send notes to returning doggie guests: “Welcome back. Woof.”

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

## IF YOU GO

Stowe is a 2½-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 10 East, Routes 35 and 133 South to the U.S. border and Vermont Highway 89 South to Exit 10. Until mid-October, take Exit 18 for Smuggler’s Notch summertime mountain route.

**Topnotch Resort:** 800-451-8686, 802-253-8585, [topnotchresort.com](http://topnotchresort.com); 4000 Mountain Rd., Stowe, Vt. Pet-friendly, no charge.

**Price:** Rooms and suites \$275-\$425 U.S. Sun.-Thurs., \$395-\$575 Fri.-Sat., including use of indoor-outdoor pools, sauna, steam, fitness centre, game room, bonfires. Evening turndown on request. Packages with meals, tennis and spa. Two- and three-bedroom townhouses available.

**Topnotch Spa:** Access to baths included with treatments; without a treatment, it’s \$20 for guests or \$50 for non-guests; a 60-minute Swedish massage costs \$150 Mon.-Thurs., including service, or \$162 Fri.-Sun.; morning stretch class is free for guests; most fitness classes \$15.

**Flannel:** Breakfast, lunch dinner, afternoon menu and pool service, Mon.-Sun.

**The Roost:** 12 p.m., to nighttime closing.



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