

New Woodstock inn plants roots in Vermont, Africa

Boutique resort has superb decor and local cuisine



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

The stylish new 506 On the River Inn, with roots in the U.S. and Africa, mixes international flair with down-home Vermont design. The country-chic boutique resort on the outskirts of vibrant Woodstock, Vt., is owned by Aaren Macksoud, a native son of Woodstock, and his wife, Paulina Raguz Macksoud, who grew up in Africa. They met while she was studying in the U.S. and they later moved to Kenya to join her family, which operates safaris as well as the elegant Palacina hotel group in Nairobi, Zanzibar and Berlin. It's all very far away, but the couple never forgot their Yankee experiences. "We opened in Woodstock because I wanted to create something back home," said Aaren, "and we especially wanted a small hotel that would reflect the best of Vermont."

They succeeded. On the River is a heartfelt homage to the rural heritage and local-food movement of the Green Mountain State. The days are filled with walking in the woods — now approaching the height of autumn colours — and at night, there are cocktails and casual suppers. In winter, downhill skiing at Killington is a half-hour drive away. The historic town of Woodstock, founded in the 1760s (more than a decade before the American War of Independence), is living Americana, not to mention a lively hub of shops and galleries. American patriot Paul Revere, a silversmith, cast the bells of several local churches in the late 1700s.

The Woodstock Inn & Resort Golf Club, built in 1895 and redesigned by Robert Trent Jones Sr., is Vermont's oldest links.

Serene and sophisticated
On the River has a peaceful setting that fronts on



The lounge at the new 506 On the River Inn in Woodstock, Vt., is richly decorated with rustic Vermont antiques.

Route 4 but spreads out back to the grassy banks of a river. It is at the heart of a rolling estate with ponds, gardens and a patio shaded by maples, elms and pines. Completing the Vermontscape, mountains rise in the distance. On the River looks like a classic Colonial farmhouse, painted in the soft colours of butter, caramel and cream. But it is a sophisticated boutique hotel with a lot of facilities: 40 rooms and suites, a villa of five apartments, a bistro and bar, an indoor pool, a fitness room and a gift shop. Kids have a teen game room and a toddlers' playhouse.

Fancy farmhouse look
The 506 (named for a previous address) is an appealing blend of vintage rustic and contemporary-chic decor, all created by Paulina Raguz Macksoud, who is design director for Palacina Interiors. The bistro, bar and outdoor



On the River's guest rooms and suites are spacious and stylishly furnished with a classic-contemporary look.

deck are clubby, intimate lounges that invite you to move around and sip here, sup there. It's all a sumptuous country vision — tufted leather sofas and tweedy armchairs flank a large fireplace, and the colour scheme is a rich sundae of chocolate, mocha

and vanilla. The decor highlight is the collection of quirky treasures that Aaren and Paulina hit on at Vermont antique fairs, including a carpenter's bench, cameras, ski boots and a spinning wheel. A hutch from a monastery now holds bottles of premium vodka and whis-

ky, and a fascinating exhibit of 200-year-old newspapers line the walls. The guest rooms and suites, all extra-large, are in more of a classic-contemporary style, with a palette of wheat, bark and linen for the curtains, armchairs and carpets and clean-cut dark walnut furniture set against pure white cotton duvets. Every room has a private balcony facing the garden and river, and each also has a pod coffee maker, mini-fridge, microwave and a 40-inch flat screen with 100 channels.

Cocktails, country cuisine
The 506 Bistro and Bar are bathed in smooth, jazzy classics by Nat King Cole, Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra — a cool musical backdrop for drinks and casual dining. There are cute accents: the menus are presented on clipboards and the flatware is bundled in Mason jars. The bar goes local with

IF YOU GO

Woodstock is a 3½-hour drive (300 kilometres) from Montreal via Vermont Interstate 89 south.

506 On the River Inn:
802- 457-7232, ontheriver-woodstock.com, 1653 West Woodstock Rd., Woodstock, Vt.

Price: Rooms, approximately \$189-\$349 U.S.; suites, \$479, for two; incl. full breakfast, Wi-Fi, fitness room, game room, toddler room and indoor swimming pool. One- and two-bedroom apartments available. Extra: massages, fly-fishing (in 2015). Children 12 and under stay free.

506 Bistro and Bar: From 5 p.m. daily; children's menu and kid seats available.

Overseas affiliates of 506:
palacina.com, thezanzi-barcollection.com, tourafrica-safaris.com.

Vermont microbrews and such cocktails as the VTini, which is shaken with maple-infused Saplings Liqueur and presented with a slice of crisp bacon. And for a global accent, the Zanzipolitan, featuring watermelon juice and triple sec, is an import from the Palacina resort in Zanzibar, which might be a first for a Vermont bar. At 506 Bistro, chef Michelle Lee serves modern American fare such as maple-glazed wings, grilled steaks with garlic mashed potatoes, shrimp with a divine basil-cream sauce or salmon lightly seasoned with beurre-blanc, followed by dreamy comfort desserts such as strawberry shortcake and key lime pie, both topped with lots of whipped cream. You also can build your own burger (beef or veggie) with Vermont cheese, chipotle aioli, salsa or zucchini relish. A buffet breakfast of fruit, cereal, eggs and bacon is laid out in a charming country kitchen, white-tiled and decorated with pottery, baskets, maple syrup buckets and weathered wooden tools. Breakfast chef Kim Sweeney bakes light and flaky chocolate and cinnamon pastries. They are don't-miss treats.

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