



The newly reopened boutique hotel, Whitehall, in Camden, Maine, is both quaint and contemporary. The historic white cottage with 36 guest rooms and suites first opened in 1901. *RARE BRICK*

# A taste of country charm at Whitehall

Folksy and fashionable redesign includes eclectic set of furniture

**ROCHELLE LASH**  
SPECIAL TO THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

The genteel, small hotel, Whitehall, which originally opened in the mid-Maine coast hot spot of Camden in 1901, has been reincarnated into an interesting boutique hotel that perfectly blends history and charm with contemporary cool.

Reopened this spring after a major overhaul, the historic white cottage once again represents

high country-style comfort, with fine American-inspired cuisine, pub life and 36 attractive, colourful guest rooms and suites.

Whitehall was built for gentrified lounging, so there is a wealth of spaces to relax, including salons, a broad veranda overlooking a tree-lined street and two magical outdoor lounges with nighttime firepits blazing under the stars.

The redesign is both folksy and fashionable, incorporating an eclectic collection of furniture

*IF YOU GO*

Whitehall, Camden, Maine: 207-236-3391, [whitehallmaine.com](http://whitehallmaine.com) or [larkhotels.com](http://larkhotels.com).

**Price:** ask about opening specials until June 30; rooms (depending on season) US\$129-\$389, per night, for two; suites

US\$209-\$489, for two, including breakfast, Wi-Fi, in-room iPad and Apple TV, shuffleboard.

**Pig + Poet:** dinner nightly except Tuesdays; bar open daily from noon.

and highlights of modern design  
with an antique background.

Boston-based Rachel Reider Interiors mixed Maine art and crafts, interesting textures of grasscloth and aged wood, and cheery, patterned fabrics in deep red, sky blue and grass green. The art is a constantly changing

homage to the local landscapes of Penobscot Bay and Mount Battie.

The accommodations are equipped with simply everything – bathrobes, corkscrews, Apple TV for the flat-screens and air-conditioning. The variety of rooms includes one with an extra bed for a child and two that share a bath-

room for economy. Some second-floor rooms have water views.

Chef Sam Talbot features Maine-centric goodies at the Pig + Poet, whose name is a tribute to Edna St. Vincent Millay, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet who gave her first reading at Whitehall Inn in 1912.

Guests feast on classics – raw bar delicacies, lobster rolls, charcuterie, clam chowder and blueberry cobbler – as well as Talbot's new American creations such as grilled clams with Nori butter and mustard, "cowboy" steak with Japanese eggplant and smoked garlic, and his signature dish of roast porchetta with egg and hot sauce.

# Portugal's Oxford alive with colour and history

**RICK STEVES**  
FOR POSTMEDIA NEWS

A couple of hours north of Lisbon, Coimbra is the Oxford or Cambridge of Portugal – the home of its most venerable university.

It's also the country's easiest-to-enjoy city — a mini-Lisbon, with everything good about urban Portugal without the intensity of a big metropolis.

I couldn't design a more delightful city for a visit.

One of the best activities in Coimbra is wandering the inviting, Arab-flavoured old town – a maze of narrow streets, time-worn shops and tiny tascas (budget eateries).

A pedestrian street divides the lower part of the old town (Baixa) from the upper (Alta). Historically, only the rich could afford to live within the protective walls of the Alta.

Even today, the Baixa remains a poorer section, with haggard women rolling wheeled shopping carts, children running barefoot and men lounging on squares as if wasting time is their life's calling.

One of my favourite old-town stops is the Mercado Municipal. Though nearly every city in Europe has a vibrant market, in many cases the character has been lost thanks to the European Union asserting itself and raising hygiene standards.

But in Coimbra, the colour and twinkle survive. Visitors can still feel the wrinkled and fragrant pulse of the town and see the “salt of the earth” in the faces of the women selling produce, while their men are off in the fields – or in their beloved “little chapels” (a.k.a. bars). To find the seafood section, just follow your nose.

While fresh seafood is abundant, the Portuguese favour bacalhau – dried and salted cod. Even though cod is no longer found in nearby waters, the Portuguese remain the world's biggest cod eaters, importing dried and salted cod from Norway.

When touring any city, it's fun to drop in on the local university. Coimbra's is beautifully situated on a hill, overlooking the city.

The university's highlight is one of Europe's best surviving Baroque libraries, displaying 55,000 books in 18th-century splendour.

Before heading back down into the heart of Coimbra, it's worth visiting the Machado de Castro Museum. Housed in an elegant old bishop's palace, it boasts many floors of mostly religious 14th- to 16th-century art.

*Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.*



Coimbra's main pedestrian drag divides the lower and upper parts of the old town. Be sure to visit the market, and if you're brave, try the salt cod. *DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCELLI*

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