

HOTEL INTEL

WOODSTOCK INN RENEWS VINTAGE VERMONT ELEGANCE

Venerable landmark hits new heights with redecoration and farm-to-table cuisine



ROCHELLE LASH

As Vermont hospitality landmarks go, the Woodstock Inn & Resort has been on top for more than 225 years, and the recent ventures in interior redecoration and farm-to-table cuisine virtually guarantee its venerable status for a long time to come.

It has had various names over the years, starting with Richardson's Tavern in 1793, and it boasts many historic touchstones. It operated the first ski lift in the U.S. in 1934 (two years after a rope tow was operational in Quebec). And shotgun golf tournaments at the Woodstock Country Club, founded in 1895, are signalled with a bell forged in the 1770s by Paul Revere, a revolutionary in the U.S. War of Independence.

The most prominent of the proprietors was U.S. financier Laurence Rockefeller, who transformed the venerable country hostelry during the 1960s into a genteel, modern-day getaway for the social and sporting elite.

The soul and spirit of this Vermont town, the Woodstock Inn boasts impressive antique decor, fine American food, an outdoor pool and a sublime spa. That's only the beginning.

The resort partners with New England Falconry, which gives lessons in birding, and with Orvis, which organizes superlative fly fishing.

It also has created a thrilling new mountain biking centre at its ski area, Suicide Six, and it is affiliated with the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, a terrific hiking area.

For a touch of terroir, guests are invited to the Billings Farm and Museum to see cows milked and butter churned.

Here's what's new for 2018:

IF YOU GO

Woodstock is a 3.5 to four-hour drive from Montreal via Highway 10 East and Vermont 89 South.

Woodstock Inn & Resort: 800-448-7900, 802-457-1100, woodstockinn.com; 14 The Green, Woodstock, Vt. **Price:** Rates fluctuate. Rooms start at US\$319; resort fee of \$30 includes Wi-Fi, access to Billings Farm & Museum, bicycles, game room, morning coffee corner, afternoon tea/cookies, in-room Nespresso/tea, newspapers, Woodstock Athletic Club, Mt. Peg Hiking Trail, business centre, local/toll-free calls, town shuttle. Spa access, \$25 for guests or free with \$65 treatment. **Woodstock Tourism:** woodstockvt.com

Renovations: The resort's lobby is dressed up in new florals, gingham and tweeds, but the stately late 18th-century roots prevail, with swag curtains, fine landscape paintings, cushy armchairs and antique-style tables set around an enormous stone fireplace.

The 142 rooms and suites recall an important country manor house, with scads of chintz, gorgeous botanical prints, marble bathrooms and Anichini bed linens (all ironed).

The showstoppers are the new Laurance S. Rockefeller Suite, three richly furnished rooms of luxe life, and the Mary F. Rockefeller Suite, feminine, refined and elegant. They both are splendidly appointed with vintage family photographs and



The elegant Mary F. Rockefeller Suite has been redone with warming drawers and a steam shower, yet it still maintains a refined and elegant ambience that hearkens to a different era. PHOTOS: WOODSTOCK INN & RESORT



The Red Barns Culinary Studio presents cooking classes and dining events.

chinoiseries, plus over-the-top accoutrements such as heated drawers in the cedar closets and steam showers in the opulent bathrooms.

The Woodstock Collection Rooms, extra-large and creative, reflect Vermont experiences, so they are decked out with artifacts of the Long Trail for hiking, the Alpine for skiing, the Angler for fishing and local classics such as the Eagle, the Sugar House and the Covered Bridge.

Culinary ventures: Fine dining at the hotel's Red Rooster features scallops, lamb, steak and

fish. Richardson's Tavern features baby back ribs, meatballs, seafood stew, cheese fondue and veal Parmesan — all classics and faves with locals and visitors.

But this year the culinary focus is on two spectacular projects: Kelly Way Gardens and the Red Barns Culinary Studio, which share a picturesque hilltop plateau amid the Green Mountains.

The organic garden, a magnificent spread, grows 55 varieties of tomatoes, plus greens, fruit, 50 herbs and edible flowers, in addition to a mushroom glen, flowers, honey bees and hops.

The resort's master gardener, Benjamin Pauly, and executive chef Rhys Lewis have crafted a farm-to-table strategy so finely tuned that the menus reflect when the zucchini harvests, the tomatoes ripen and the berries mature.

All this means guests can get involved in the Woodstock Inn's cuisine scene from the ground up. Workshops cover floral arranging, edible flowers and events such as Slow Tea in the Garden, using the harvest of herbs for tea and honey from the hives.

The Red Barns Culinary Studio is the other new venue set amid the inn's country gardens. Here, guests can take cooking classes in a lavish demonstration kitchen and experience special dinners as the local produce rolls out.

There are themed dinners (\$55, most Sundays until Oct. 28) and Foliage Dinners, (\$80, Sept. 28-30) that feature garden treasures such as wild mushroom toast with roasted garlic, gnocchi squash with rosemary crème, herb roasted tomatoes, beet salad with mint pesto, and mains including prosciutto-wrapped scallops, braised lamb and cider-braised pork with cheddar.

rochelle@rochellelash.com
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