



WOODLAND HIDEAWAY

A hidden country gem, Twin Farms brings storybook

Vermont to life BY ANNE MARIE O'CONNOR

Much to locals' vast amusement, many Sun Belters (and even New Yorkers like myself) head to Vermont in winter to see the snow, much the way others clog the highways in autumn to see the leaves change color. But as I drive through Connecticut and Massachusetts and into Vermont, there isn't a flake of white powder to be seen; instead everything is a depressing winter brown, even though it's mid-January. Suddenly, within a couple of miles of Twin Farms, snow miraculously appears on the hills and fields.

It's the kind of detail that one can count on Twin Farms to think of—to make sure there's snow to complete the picture-perfect Vermont tableau guests come to see. In fact, Twin Farms is all about giving visitors the classic

Vermont experience: In winter, there are fireplaces everywhere, with kindling and logs stacked up, just waiting for a guest to strike a match, sink into a cozy chair and sip a glass of Port. In summer, there are porches with Adirondack chairs overlooking meadows full of wildflowers. And in fall, there are miles of trails through the hills, which are covered with trees ablaze in color. It's all the pleasure of Vermont without the hassles of shoveling out the driveway after a snowstorm or hauling the canoe out of the basement.

But despite being one of only 30 of Mobil's Five-Star Properties in North America, Twin Farms' main achievement is that it manages to be so utterly homey and unpretentious.

Located in tiny Barnard, about ten miles from Woodstock in central Vermont, the vibe is less like staying at a fancy hotel than visiting a friend's summer house, if said friend was very cool and artsy, an amazing cook and was always thrilled to see you pull in the driveway.

Upon arrival, there is no front desk or check-in; instead one of Twin Farms' friendly activity coordinators comes out to the car to greet us. While another employee valets our car to our cottage and deposits our luggage

Twin Farms is all about giving visitors the classic Vermont experience...in summer, porches overlook meadows

inside, she escorts us on a tour of Twin Farms' Main House, a 1795 farmhouse filled with the most extraordinary art. The house has been added on to over the years and currently has several guest rooms as well as the Dining Room and other public rooms which guests are always welcome to enjoy. The view from the house is breathtaking—it's built on the top of a hill and overlooks the wooded valley. In the distance is Mount Ascutney.

Across a picturesque walking bridge is The Pub, which is stocked with every board game imaginable, a pool table,



a jukebox and a refrigerator full of Champagne, wine and beers from around the world. Downstairs is The Spa and the fully equipped fitness center. As well, there's hiking, canoeing, biking, tennis, fishing and croquet; golf and horseback riding are offered nearby. (In winter, there are snowshoes, cross-country skis, downhill skis, toboggans and ice skates at the ready whenever guests feel the urge to burn a few calories outdoors.) I'm already a little on edge—there's so much relaxing to do, how will I ever fit it all in?

Our coordinator is just one of a long line of superb practitioners of Twin Farms-style hospitality. In 1928, *Main Street* author Sinclair Lewis bought the property with his wife, journalist Dorothy Thompson. They frequently entertained a literary set; the property's charms were even enough to lure famous curmudgeon H.L. Mencken. In the early 1970s, Twin Farms was acquired as a summer residence by Thurston Twigg-Smith, a Hawaiian newspaper magnate and committed art collector; there is evidence of his passion everywhere, from many superb and often witty examples of American folk art to paintings by David Hockney, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns.

In the early 1990s, Twigg-Smith, tired of the long commute from Hawaii, decided to convert the property into a hotel. Having slowly expanded over the years, the property presently includes four suites in the Main House, two in an adjacent cottage and nine freestanding cottages, each whimsical adaptations of a wide





after it. The next two hours were a blur, beginning with a soft brushing over the skin, then a scrubbing with warm salt followed by a rinse in an amazing shower with a dozen or so heads that target every inch of my body. Warm oil is then massaged in before a soak in a therapeutic whirlpool tub, followed by a clay-seaweed mask and a warm wrap. All the products used were created especially for Twin Farms, a collection appropriately named 'Out of the Woods' by Arcania Apothecary, a British company (each bathroom at

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Twin Farms is stocked with them). Afterward, my skin feels better than it has since I was three years old, and despite my previous exhaustion, I feel strangely invigorated.

Relaxing is a full-time job at Twin Farms, and I had barely finished my treatments before it was time to head to the Main House for cocktail hour and dinner. Fellow guests the first night were five couples, old friends from Seattle and L.A., who spend a week together at Twin Farms every year. After a glass of Perrier-Jouët and an amuse-bouche of Parmesan-prosciutto bruschetta that were so delicious even my non-pork-eating companion gobbled down three, we

range of styles, including Italian, Adirondack, Japanese, Moroccan, log cabin, American Colonial and French Rococo. Designed by the late Jed Johnson (Twin Farms is widely considered to be his most personal project), each also blends in perfectly with the bucolic Vermont countryside.

We're staying in Barn, a stunning Scandinavian-style cottage with a gambrel roof, a massive fireplace and warm blond wood walls. Our luggage had already arrived, along with a massage therapist, who was setting up her table in front of the fire to give my travel companion her in-room massage. I was scheduled for the one-hour, 45-minute Ultimate Body Treatment, The Spa's pièce de résistance, so I headed back down the curving road.

Unlike spas at larger resorts, which have an assembly-line feel, The Spa at Twin Farms seems almost private. As I entered, there was no one else around, except the warm and wonderful aesthetician, who popped her head out of the prep room to greet me. The Ultimate Body Treatment is not a misnomer—you'll be spoiled for life



were led to the Game Room, a whimsical room full of game-related art including checkers boards, exotic card games and a trompe l'oeil game board. (Whenever there isn't a full house, guests are often invited to dine alone in one of the Main House's rooms.)



There is no menu for lunch and dinner at Twin Farms, but a detailed dietary questionnaire is sent to guests before arrival, so vegetarians won't be faced with a plate of venison. The brilliance of the food at Twin Farms is that it is so delicious yet so healthy, but healthy in that French way—with small portions and lots of vegetables—as opposed to a less savory, dietetic spin on recipes. Chef Neil Wigglesworth, a Brit who trained at La Gavroche in London and has been at Twin Farms since it opened, also emphasizes the freshest ingredients and uses locally produced ones whenever possible (in summer, much of the produce comes from Twin Farms' own certified organic garden). The wait staff are all incredibly knowledgeable about the wines as

Courses arrived at a leisurely pace, and a specially chosen wine accompanied each one.

Afterward we headed to The Pub, where we shared a couple of bottles of Perrier-Jouët with the West Coast guests and listened to hits from the 1950s and 1960s on the jukebox while playing a rousing game of Scrabble. Finally, we walked back to our cottage (although the staff is always happy to chauffeur you, especially if you've overindulged!)

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well as every dish and all the ingredients; our waitress had even hand-selected some CDs (Simply Red and Frank Sinatra) she thought we'd enjoy with dinner—and she was right on the money.

The first course that night was Key West stone crab with crab-asparagus risotto and shallot bay broth. Often an afterthought, the salad, a wonderfully complex work of harmony that combined mâche, edamame, peanut oil and lemongrass vinaigrette, was a standout. The entrée was medallions of loin of lamb with potato gratin, trumpet mushrooms, confit of eggplant, pearl onions and couscous. Dessert was a stupendous white and dark chocolate soufflé.





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and sank into our beds for a long winter's nap, in a luxurious nest of horsehair mattresses, featherbeds and down comforters.

Almost nothing could have lured me out of our cozy cabin the next morning except the titillating information that breakfast was the best meal of the day (guests can also order a continental breakfast to be served in-room). I ordered one of the specials, French toast made with a croissant stuffed with jam and Vermont goat cheese and cooked until the filling was oozing. But I justified it by telling myself I needed sustenance for the busy day ahead, which was scheduled back-to-back with more meals, drinks, beauty treatments (including a fantastic facial and a cranial massage by another truly extraordinary aesthetician), some reading by the fireplace and more than one nap. (It was snowing too hard to make outdoor activities enjoyable.)

On our last morning, as I was walking back to our cottage after breakfast, our activity coordinator drove by, stopping to ask if I was up for cross-country skiing or snowshoeing. "Of course, I'll be right down," I replied.

"Don't forget to check out," she reminded me in a friendly way as she drove on. I stood there in shock. They



expected me to leave? And I was feeling so at home! It was the only bad news I'd received since arriving.

Twin Farms, Barnard, Vermont

Rates: \$1,050 to \$2,700 per night, including all meals and beverages, on-site recreation and equipment, phone and Internet usage.

For more information or to make a reservation, please call 800.894.6327 or visit www.twinfarms.com