



cocktails & good company



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Imperatives

Traveler's Checks

The fitness facilities are first-rate, occupying an entire level of the spa, and there's an Omni tennis court for racket enthusiasts.

Beware of the gift shop—Loro Piana cashmeres and Brunello Cucinelli jackets can break a credit card.



PURE DELIGHTS: Reopened under new ownership in early 2014, the Mayflower Grace is made for relaxation.

The Escape Artist / Andrew Rimas GRACE NOTES

THE INN EXPERIENCE IS ELEVATED AT CONNECTICUT'S MAYFLOWER GRACE.

NEW ENGLAND INNS SHARE A COMMON thread of DNA, harking back to some ur-bed-and-breakfast lost in the Colonial mists. (Somewhere, an archaeologist is at this moment unearthing the remnants of a fresh-baked pastry basket once served to Cotton Mather.) They all have a congenital disposition toward wallpaper. They all sport oriental rugs. Accent pillows, bed skirts, 19th-century bibelots—these are in their very blood.

What makes Connecticut's Mayflower Grace worth visiting are its anomalies: the poet's maze in the garden, the Jonathan Cartwright menu in the restaurant, the spa that seems lifted directly out of Rivendell. This is a New England inn that breaks with the norms, despite its creaking floorboards and fireside reading nooks.

Connecticut's Litchfield Hills are rich with scenic trails, foliage and riches—since the first Gilded Age, they've been a haven for Manhattanites with

cash but without the patience to drive all the way to the Berkshires. Set on 58 acres of private gardens and woodland, the Mayflower Grace seems larger on account of an enveloping 3,000 acres of nature preserve. Entering the main house, guests receive a glass of bubbly and a first impression of old wood and oil paintings. The property's bed and breakfast lineage is obvious: A comfortable parlor offers board games and tea, and a drowsy fire crackles in the library. The 30 guest rooms sport distinct decor but have a unifying aesthetic of Yankee elegance. There are four-poster beds and gas fireplaces, of course, but the furnishings get a boost from Frette linens, Limoges bathroom fittings and potted orchids.

As a member of Relais & Châteaux and the Grace chain of luxury properties (readers may know its sisters, the White Barn Grace in Kennebunk and the Vanderbilt Grace in Newport), the Mayflower prides itself, justifiably, on its kitchen. There's the comfortable Tap Room, which is ideal for an after-

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRACE HOTEL GROUP

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noon snack of truffle fries and beer, but it's imperative to dine at the house restaurant, Muse by Jonathan Cartwright.

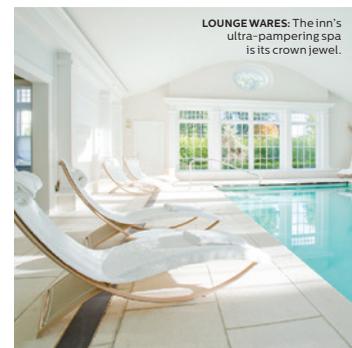
Its conceit is New England flavors executed with European technique, which makes for a very fruitful marriage. A cream of local squash is a masterpiece in the medium of vegetable soup, thanks to inspired use of pumpkin seed oil, apple and sea scallop. Butter-poached lobster gives a nod to Cartwright's work at the White Barn—the pearlescent meat is anchored with smoked corn puree and paprika butter sauce. A thick cut of seared venison is heaven in the form of grass-fed game, the earthiness of the meat blooming with grace notes thanks to a red wine and veal demi-glace. After that crescendo, order the homemade cinnamon doughnuts with cider gel and call it a night, or take a scotch and a dish of local cheeses to the parlor and nurse them over a game of Scrabble.

The next morning, walk off the fumes by exploring the hedges of the American Poets Maze. Dead ends yield plaques inscribed with poems from writers like Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost and Walt Whitman ("O amazement of things! even the least particle!"). Wending out the gate, guests will pass a putting green before finding themselves confronted by a 20,000-square-foot luxury spa. This is the Mayflower's truest glory, and the reason that even the most ambitious hiker is liable to get sidetracked into slippers and a bathrobe.

The centerpiece is the Garden Room, a palatial white parlor dressed with orchids and silver, plus a row of plush chaises set before enormous picture windows. These frame an immaculate lawn running down to a pond and woodland. Lying on the pillows with your feet under a fleece that feels like it's spun from children's laughter and baby rabbits, it's easy to slip into a heavenly vision. Yes, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it comes with a cup of herbal tea.

Don't yield to the temptation to nap. The wet areas are artfully designed, fiercely heated and blissful on a winter morning. Once you've built up enough steam, take a peaceful wallow in an indoor pool that overlooks the gardens. Suspended in the warmth, with your eyes awash in beauty, it might strike you that you've really gotten away from it all. ♦

The Mayflower Grace, 118 Woodbury Road, Washington, Conn. (860-868-9466) gracehotels.com/mayflower



LOUNGE WARES: The inn's ultra-pampering spa is its crown jewel.



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