



GET OUT OF TOWN

By **DAVID LANDSEL**

May 23, 2006 -- **MILFORD, PA**

The best little town you've never visited

"It's like there's a big cone of protection over this town," an ex-Upper-East-Sider-turned-local recently confided. It's easy to see what she's talking about.

This artistically-inclined Delaware River village a little over an hour from the George Washington Bridge is remarkably easy to find, yet housing remains inexpensive, the weekend scene low-key.

What to do? As much or as little as you want. Hike the mountains, check out the new organic farmer's market downtown Saturday mornings; peek in at the art galleries; or just sit on the porch at Dimmick's, a true road-house style restaurant.

When to go: The town hosts two major events, its Music Festival (June 9-11) and the Black Bear Film Festival (Oct. 12-15).

Where to stay: This weekend marks the beginning of a new era in local history - the long-awaited reopening of the historic Hotel Fauchere. Managed by veterans of the exclusive Amanresort group, expect superb hospitality, top-notch amenities and a memorable dining experience in the slow-food tradition (from \$220, [570] 409-1212; hotelfauchere.com).

Info: pikechamber.com

BETHEL, N.Y.

Back to the garden

It's the biggest thing to hit Sullivan County since Woodstock. After more stops and starts than a Friday night on Montauk Highway, Max Yasgur's Farm, home of the most legendary concert in history, is back.

Opening July 1, The Bethel Woods Center for the Arts will feature a stage nearly twice the size as that of Radio City, offering both covered and lawn seating that can accommodate nearly 20,000 people for seasonal concerts.

This summer's lineup is like a schizophrenic's iPod, ranging from the New York Philharmonic (July 1) to Ashlee Simpson (July 8). (Janis must be spinning in her grave.)

When to go: Check out the Jazz Festival, July 22-23, featuring Wynton Marsalis (2-day passes are \$80;

bethelwoodslive.org).

Where to stay: Original visitors to the site slept on the lawn - today, the nearby alternatives aren't much more inspired (there are none). It's worth the drive over to Forestburgh, where you'll find the Inn at Lake Joseph, which not only offers bed & breakfast-style rooms, but also cottage and lodge accommodations. (from \$170, [845] 791-9506, lakejoseph.com).

Info: scva.net

MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE

The times, they are a' changing

If there was one thing a weekender could count on, it was that Mohonk, a historic resort in New York's Shawangunk Mountains would never change. Well, at least not drastically.

Owned and operated by the Smiley family since opening nearly 140 years ago, the part-Victorian, part-arts and crafts hotel, perched high above the Hudson Valley with some of the best views from a hotel room in North America, has always been comfortable, if rustic.

The food is good, if not earth-shatteringly great, and the hiking trails on the 2,200-acre preserve are inspiring. While it was used to be a chore scoring a glass of wine (the family, once staunchly - and still partly - Quaker, were never keen on booze), today, there's a bar. And now, completely out of character, there's also a 30,000-square-foot spa, which opened earlier this year.

The Shawangunks' unique quartz conglomerate stone features prominently in the construction, as do sturdy wooden beams (echoing those in the dining room). There's an enormous indoor pool, excellent locker facilities with steam and sauna and glass-enclosed porch-style relaxation spaces for men, women and unisex (the latter has a large outdoor deck with a heated mineral pool).

Signature treatments are locally focused, ranging from an exfoliation with pulverized conglomerate to a massage with the ubiquitous red witch-hazel. The young staff could use a bit more time to settle in, however.

When to go: Midweek, when the crowds have abated. Check, however, that there's not a large conference in-house. The entrance and front desk area aren't adequate to handle the crush when the hotel is at capacity (a situation it often approaches).

Info: Double-occupancy, all-inclusive, from \$415. [800] 772-6646, mohonk.com.

LANCASTER, PA

Creative thinking

Pennsylvania Dutch Country isn't quite what it used to be -proximity to Philadelphia (and, after a fashion, New York)has become an increasing threat to the region's idyllic way of life, (not to mention the agricultural community). Today, in places, it appears to be just another ex-urb, with subdivisions and office parks springing up where farmland used to be.

While the county adjusts - not without some discomfort - to its new function as a holding ground for urban refugees, the county seat - the historic city of Lancaster - is embracing the changes. Its charming downtown, home to the excellent Central Market, the legendary Fulton Opera House and the re-located Lancaster Art Museum, is starting to lure in more and more creative types.

When to go: The monthly First Friday art crawl, when downtown galleries stay open late, and there's lots of wine and live music.

Where to stay: Wait until August, when the Lancaster Arts Hotel debuts in an old tobacco warehouse on the northwestern edge of downtown. Furnishings and design elements in the 63 rooms and suites will largely be locally crafted, and an in-house gallery will rotate regional work (rates to be determined, [717] 299-3000, lancasterartshotel.com).

THE WINVIAN

Meet the next great hotel

New Yorkers are lucky enough to have within striking distance two of the top resorts currently operating in the U. S.

In the Adirondacks, there's The Point, the Great Camp-style retreat of legend. Once a Rockefeller summer home, it now caters to people with similar cash reserves, in a deceptively simple and casual environment.

And then, in central Vermont, there's Twin Farms, an even more luxurious entry, the mention of which makes any hotel fetishist's eyes glaze over either in anger (over never having been) or happiness (remembering their stay).

There are drawbacks, however. Both hotels are more than 5 hours by car from New York, and flying there isn't easy, either.

What if we told you that in less than two hours, you could drive to a hotel that offers a similar - and, if early site visits are any indication - maybe even better, experience?

Located on the edge of a 4,000-acre preserve just north of the Litchfield Hills village of Morris, Connecticut, the historic Winvian Farm is in the latter stages of being transformed into The Winvian, a hotel unlike any most of us have ever checked in to.

Owned by the folks behind Vermont's successful Pitcher Inn, there are just 19 rooms, 18 of them individual cottages, scattered about the 113-acre property - each designed along a Connecticut theme, by a grand total of 15 architects. Themes range from the simply elegant Library to the bizarre Helicopter suite, complete with Sikorsky chopper-turned lounge. (All units have a whirlpool tub and steam shower.)

Lucky guests have the run of a sprawling main house featuring game rooms, a self-service pantry, dining room and plenty of space to just relax. Also on property: a large spa facility, state-of-the-art meeting space and lots of trails to explore. Service should be out of this world -at least that's the promise.

When to go: Any time you can afford it. We're pinching pennies now.

Info: Rates are scheduled to start at \$1,450, all-inclusive; [860] 567-9600; winvian.com.

LEWISTON, N.Y.

One for our side

It's been interesting viewing for years now. We're talking about how the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls region booms, while on home turf, attempts to kick-start tourism (and the city of Niagara Falls, N.Y., itself) fail miserably.

Just north of the mess, however, the historic town of Lewiston exists quite happily as an arts-focused weekend destination.

Boasting a prime location over the Niagara Gorge but without any of the clutter you'll find further down, Lewiston is home to Artpark, an outdoor theater hosting a full series of musical and theatrical events each season. And it's adjacent to a downtown that's home to pretty historic architecture and some great hangouts. Best of all are the hiking opportunities along the Gorge - that and the easy access over to the Niagara Wine Region, a must-explore. And let's not forget the Falls, just to the south.

When to go: During the annual Artpark season. Dates of notes this year include violinist Joshua Bell (July 14) and the hit musical "The Full Monty" (Aug. 10-20). For a full schedule, visit artpark.net.

Where to stay: Built in Greek-revival style and offering gorge views, The Niagara at Barton Hill debuts August 1, offering all-suite accommodations (80 in all), a spa featuring Terme di Saturnia products, and fine dining. Public spaces will serve as a satellite exhibition space for Buffalo's cutting-edge Albright-Knox Art Gallery (from \$149, [800] 718-1812, theniagarainn.com).

THE LODGE AT WOODLOCH

The Poconos go world-class (can you believe it?)

It's becoming difficult to lump The Poconos into one convenient package (to either love or dismiss, depending on your take).

While the southern end of things continues on as it always has - a mix of water parks, ski hills and resorts with heart-shaped beds - things are growing increasingly smart up north.

Specifically, the neighboring Pennsylvania towns of Hawley and Honesdale, both an appealing mix of new and old. You can shop in boutiques and take cooking classes or case thrift stores and drink in dive bars.

The pace of change quickens this summer, with the opening of an up-market destination spa. Located on 75 acres and facing a private lake, the Lodge at Woodloch will offer just 58 rooms centered around a 40,000-square-foot spa facility.

The owners have years of experience in the spa business; the spa director boasts an impressive resume. Woodloch will open June 26. Stay tuned.

Info: All-inclusive (including some spa programs) from \$575 pp/per night, based on double occupancy, [866] 953-8500; thelodgeatwoodloch.com.

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