

Grand Estate in the White Mountains Feels like Home

It's hearty meals and comfort first at the Adair Country Inn

Adair Country Inn & Restaurant is a top-drawer establishment of rare quality and with an attention to detail.

Homey yet elegant, and friendly but private, Adair is the quintessential upscale New England inn. It has accrued a reputation as a romantic getaway and a gourmet dining spot. It's also a comfortable jumping-off point for outdoor adventures in the White Mountain National Forest.

The grand estate was built during the Roaring '20s by Frank Hogan, a lawyer for two of the men charged in the Teapot Dome Scandal, who said that the ideal client is "a rich man when he's scared." Adair was an extravagant wedding gift from Hogan to his daughter, Dorothy Adair Hogan.

The Georgian manor is sturdy, spacious and soundproof. The private forest, luxuriant gardens and extensive walking paths were sculpted by the landscape architectural firm founded by Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed Mount Royal Park and New York's Central Park, as well as many other public gardens.

The air of refinement created by the patrician family still pervades the inn. Adair has history without sagging sofas or creaking stairs. There are few concessions to modern life - wireless Internet access and a plasma television are found in the lower-level Tap Room lounge.

Adair is owned by Nick and Betsy Young and is operated by innkeepers Ilja and Brad Chapman. Ilja was a hotel manager in the Netherlands, and Brad was a machinist in the U.S. navy; they met while working in tourism on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. They're energetic and capable and exude a sense that nothing can go wrong and that everything will be taken care of.

Guests are announced on a welcome sheet - first names only - so there's a clubby atmosphere right from the get-go. Like a hostess welcoming arrivals to a private house, Ilja Chapman gives each guest a brief history of the Adair and a peek at a leather-bound album with vintage photos. Now that you feel like one of the family, it's on to one of nine guest rooms.

In the rooms, the details start showing in deep relief. They are formal junior suites with high-quality antiques and majestic four-poster beds, many draped with gauzy white canopies. All of the decorative features - wallpaper, fresh flowers, silk-shaded lamps and landscape paintings - have been chosen with care and taste. The evening turn-down service includes Brad Chapman's chocolate chip cookies and a small handwritten card with a philosophical quote of the day. The bathrooms are fresh and renovated, equipped with toiletries and thick stacks of white towels wrapped with green silk cords. The inn has library nooks, and many of the books found in the guest rooms date to the original family. Dorothy Adair signed and dated all her school books in a tidy writing style. Later in life, she practised her new

married name, Guider, writing it over and over again in French romance novels.

Tea time at Adair is a treat, a small serve yourself affair with an array of exotic teas from Africa and Asia like Avalanche Rooibos, Kenya Black and Masala Chai. Guests spoon loose tea leaves into tiny silk bags for brewing and then settle down in front of the living room's wood-burning fireplace. On warm days, the patio doors open and guests can spend the afternoon surrounded by mountain and gardens.

The Tap Room, a rustic lounge on the lower level of the inn, is the place for cocktails, either before or after dinner. The dark wooden beams, stone walls and a huge fireplace set the scene for a relaxing, convivial gathering after a day in the great outdoors. Vintage black-and-white photos of Frank Hogan and his Washington pals, including Teddy Roosevelt, tell more tales.

"On Saturday nights, the Tap Room gets downright rowdy," said Ilja Chapman. Well, let's say it's a relatively sedate New England kind of rowdy.

Adair's chef, Jeanne McCredie, calls her cuisine "New England food - hearty, simple American dining." With a three-course dinner ranging from \$35 to \$45, it's also moderately priced. Specialties include lobster bisque, stuffed artichokes, blackened shrimp with angel-hair pasta, rosemary-crusting lamb, maple glazed chicken, and, for dessert, pumpkin cheesecake and hot apple tarts.

The Adair Inn is at the heart of an exceptional region for nature observation and hiking. The nearby town of Franconia is home to Cannon Mountain, which has a tramway to the summit and its views of the White Mountains and the fascinating glacial formations of the Flume Gorge.

The annual Fields of Lupine Festival, June 6-22, celebrates the tall, purple wildflower that flourishes in spring and early summer on mountainsides and rolling meadows. The festival is a show of nature, plus three weeks of cultural events in Bethlehem and neighbouring towns of Sugar Hill, Franconia and Bretton Woods. The festival will feature art exhibits, concerts, open-air markets and specialty dinners at local inns.

If You Go

Bethlehem is a two-hour, 45-minute drive from Montreal. From the South Shore, take Highway 10 through the Eastern Townships and Highway 55 south to the U.S. border. Continue on Interstate 91 in Vermont and Interstate 93 in New Hampshire, taking Exit 40 for Littleton/Bethlehem.

Adair Country Inn & Restaurant, 888-444-2600, www.adairinn.com, 80 Guider Lane, Bethlehem, N.H. Prices: All rates are for two people, per night, and include afternoon tea, breakfast and evening turndown service with sweets; \$195 U.S. for a regular room, \$235 with a fireplace; \$295 for a deluxe room with fireplace and double soaking tub; \$325 for the Kinsman Suite. Dinner: Thursday-Monday roughly \$35-\$50 per person, plus tax, tip and wine. Mothers' Day brunch, \$26; Fathers' Day BBQ, \$18.

Seasonal packages: Golf is available at Maplewood and Bethlehem Country Clubs. Mother's Day and summer theatre deals are available. And there is a romance package, which includes fruit and cheese, a gift, dinner and spa lotions.

Fields of Lupine Festival: www.bethlehemwhitemtns.com or Franconia Notch Chamber of Commerce:
603-823-5661, www.franconianotch.org.

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(Text by Hilary Nangle/ Globe Correspondent; Handout photo)

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