

# LUXURY SPA FINDER

THE SPA LIFESTYLE AT ITS FINEST

\$PA VALUE:  
VERMONT'S  
EQUINOX

## SPECIAL ISSUE SUMMER SPAAAHH!

**7** NEW ENGLAND  
SPA ESCAPES

**I** ALPINE BEAUTY  
RETREAT

**33** ACCESSORIES:  
SUN-SHIELD  
CHIC

**5** TRESS  
RELIEVERS

**B** SMOOTHING  
SCRUBS

## THE ULTIMATE SUNSCREEN GUIDE

- WHAT'S NEW  
WHAT WORKS  
WHAT'S BOGUS
- **23** SUNSCREENS  
EVALUATED

SPECIAL REPORT  
THE **GREEN** HOME SPA

JULY-AUGUST 2007  
\$4.99 US • \$5.99 CANADA



WWW.SPAFINDER.COM

# Inn. Souciant

Winvian breaks the mold with the greatest of ease

By Ann Abel · Photography by Bill Phelps

**I**T'S SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT WHEN I REALIZE JUST WHAT A LIGHTEARTED place I've come to. My fiancé, Andy, and I are in the game room at Winvian, a new hotel in the Litchfield Hills of northwestern Connecticut, with four 50-something couples. We're playing pool, foosball, and an addictive table-shuffleboard game that reminds us of the air hockey we enjoyed as kids in the '80s. It's long past everyone's bedtime, and our fellow guests are seriously successful people—the British head of a fashion house, a Silicon Valley software engineer—yet here we are, unself-consciously playing. The fact that none of us is particularly good at these games doesn't matter. I can't remember being at a resort and finding the other guests this corny and carefree.

I knew Winvian would be whimsical. Long before it opened, in January, its promotional materials—a brochure like a pop-up book, with 3-D glasses to view two of the pages; a website so clever that Andy, a graphic designer, bookmarked it as a specimen of winning design—had made clear that it would be aggressively fanciful. Each of the 18 cottages would have a theme, carried to the nth degree: The 950-square-foot Treehouse is suspended 35 feet above the ground, and Helicopter holds a 56-foot-long 1968 Sikorsky Sea King Pelican. Even the gym would be called the Playground.

I admit I feared it all might be a mite too precious—especially at upwards of \$1,450 a night—but the whimsy works.

Winvian's founders, Win and Maggie Smith, had used the decorating formula at their Pitcher Inn in Vermont, where each of the 11 rooms was done by a different architect, the whole orchestrated by architect David Sellers. (See page 112 for profiles of it and five more New England inns with spas.) At the urging of their daugh-

**The Maritime** cottage, one of the 18 fanciful accommodations at Winvian, has a light-house theme, with a round, elevated bedroom (opposite) overlooking the fireplace in the living room, and a bathroom inspired by cruise ships and their porthole windows.





**The Log Cabin** cottage (opposite) is charmingly rough-hewn but hardly roughing it. This page: Social life revolves around the original 1775 farmhouse (top), especially its comfortable game room (bottom).

ter, Heather, who was then running the Pitcher Inn, Win and Maggie decided to create another quirky-luxe hotel, this time pulling out all the stops—Pitcher Inn version 2.0. The site would be the 113-acre estate with a 1775 farmhouse that Win inherited from his father, a cofounder of Merrill Lynch. Win Sr. bought the property in 1948 and coined

the name Winvian by combining his name with that of his wife, Vivian. (Maggie is now the sole owner of both hotels.)

The project took six years. Again, it was a collaborative effort: 18 cottages designed by 15 architects, a guest suite and common areas in the original farmhouse, and a spectacular conservatory-like spa that lives much larger than its 5,000 square feet. The architects were given only two parameters: Each cottage had to reference Connecticut and had to accommodate a king bed, large bathroom, and desk. Otherwise, their task was to dream and, it seems, to spend: Materials are top-notch, craftsmanship is impeccable, and every detail, down to the soap dishes and drawer pulls, is one-of-a-kind. (The Smiths decline to say what they spent, though one of the architects involved told the *L.A. Times* that some cottages exceeded US\$500,000 to build and decorate.)

For our weekend stay in March, Andy and I choose Industry, mostly for its bathtub—built for two (of course) and adjacent to a two-sided fireplace that also warms the living room. Overhead, there's not just a conventional skylight but a 15-foot-high shaft that sculpts the sunshine into a column. Architect Kimo Griggs expressed the industry theme with mahogany floors and ceilings, a black-and-white palette, and 1920s-era furnishings like stainless-steel-rimmed Corbusier club chairs. The cottage is accented with vintage tools, books on the Machine Age (plus *The Beatles Unseen Archives*, a photo book that Beatlemaniac Andy really hasn't seen before), and old-fashioned wood puzzles, which we can't help but take apart Sunday morning—and hope housekeeping can reassemble. But it also has 21st-century amenities like wireless Internet and a Bose sound system, and smart details: The Nespresso coffeemaker is perfectly intuitive, and a switch by the nightstand labeled "Last to Bed" turns off every light.

Saturday afternoon, after a wine and cheese tasting, we set out with three couples for an impromptu tour of each other's cottages. A guest assistant chauffeurs us and lets us into some unoccupied cottages, too. We all agree that Helicopter, by architect Malcolm Appleton, is amusing but we wouldn't want to spend a weekend in it. The favorites are John Martin's Camping, in which the huge window panes are separated by tree-trunk-shaped dividers and the ceiling lights up at night with glow-in-the-dark stars, and Beaver Lodge, in which an







actual beaver dam—John Carino dismantled dams from around the property, pressure-washed, and reassembled them here—hangs over the bed.

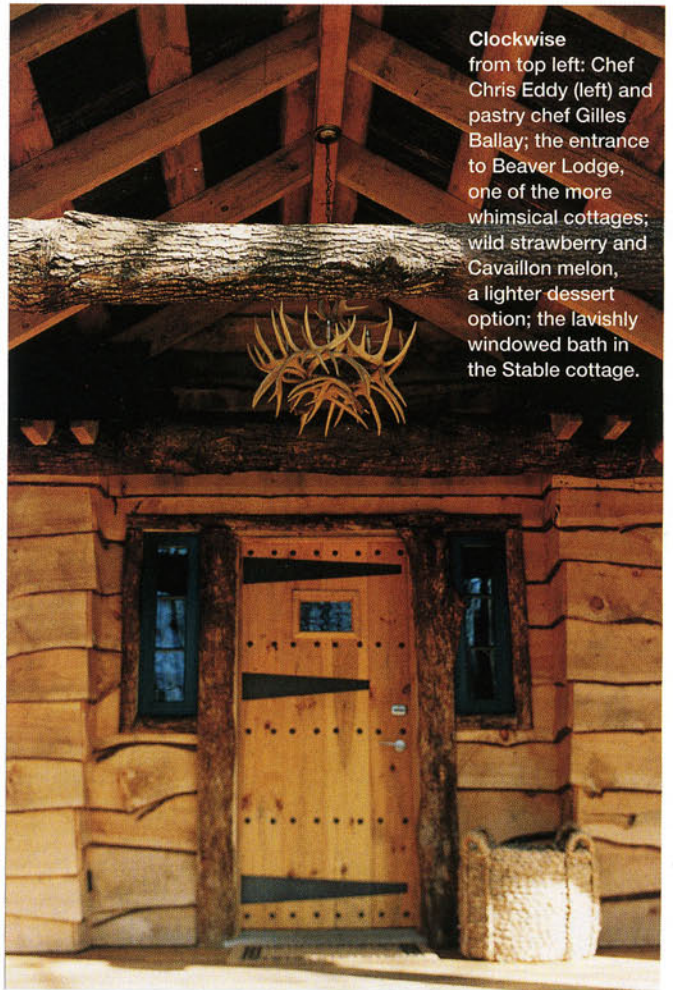
Little wonder, then, that “What cottage are you in?” is the preferred ice-breaker. We strike up conversations easily, mainly about how much fun we’re having—“it’s like Disneyland, but I’d come back,” says one well-traveled woman—and how Winvian compares (not unfavorably) to its peers, particularly the Point in upstate New York and Twin Farms in Vermont. These conversations are well-lubricated, as rates include all meals and *carte blanche* at the bars. (And 260 wines are available for an extra charge.)

You can almost consume your money’s worth, in quantity and in quality—the “beef two ways” on the menu is Kobe. Winvian’s chef, Chris Eddy, has a pedigree, too: He worked in the kitchens of Daniel Boulud and Alain Ducasse. Saturday morning, we sit down to sweet fruit, fresh pastries, and some of the best *pain au chocolat* on this side of the Atlantic. That’s just the warm-up to the main course, bowls of fluffy, buttery eggs, Andy’s scrambled with ham and sausage, plus four strips of crispy bacon on the side. A weekend of carefree eating wouldn’t kill anyone, but I’m reasonably well-behaved

**Winvian’s spa** (above) has the airy, light-filled feel of a conservatory, especially in its loftlike relaxation area (opposite). Its more rustic side shows in the corridor leading to the six treatment rooms (bottom right). Top right: Blissing out during a Tailor Made Massage.



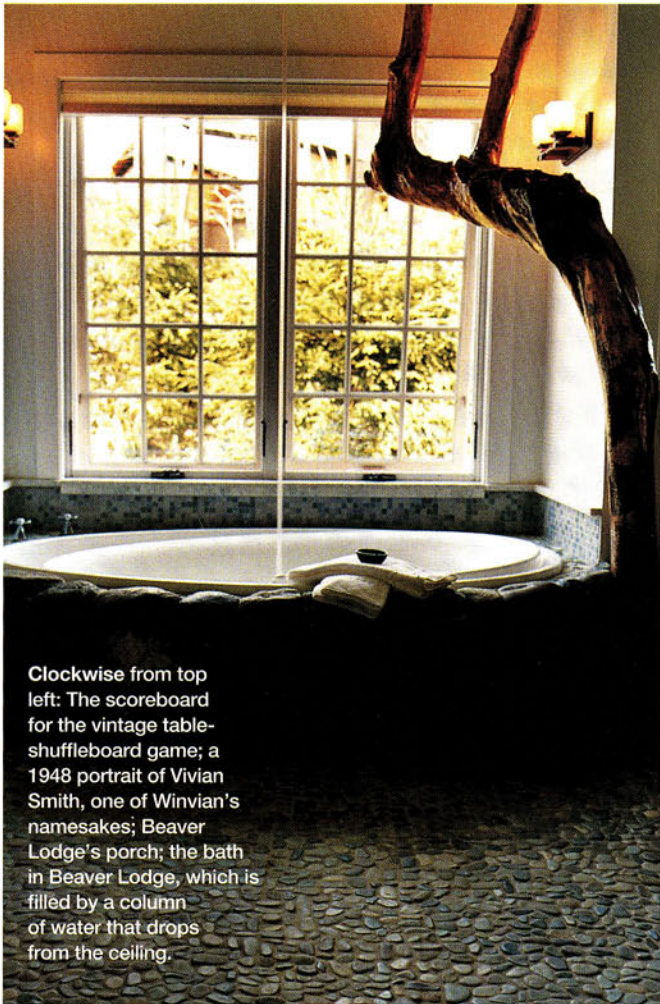
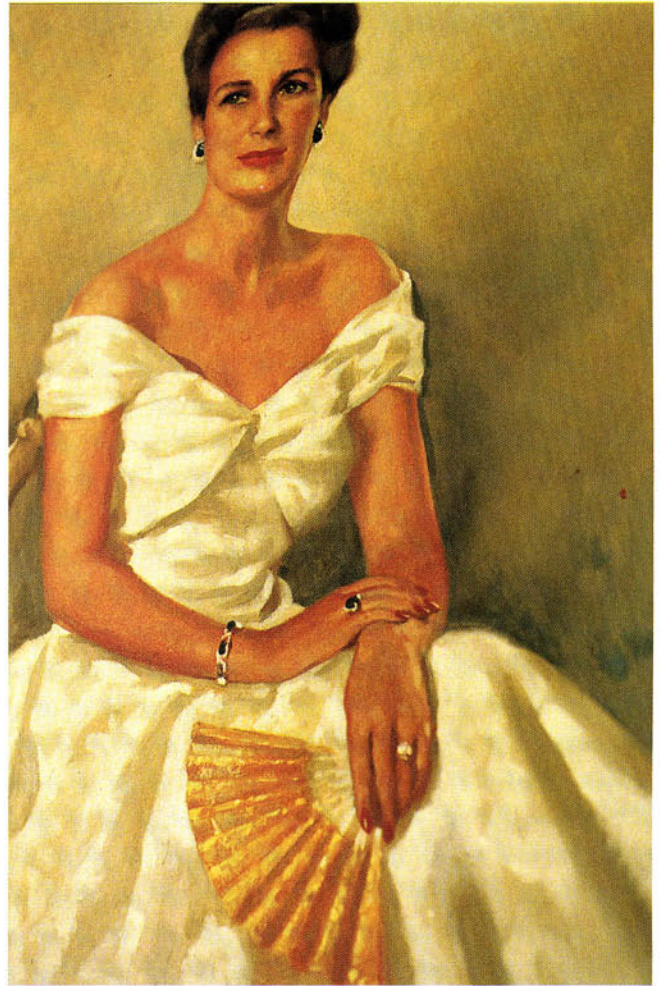
# INSIDER'S GUIDE NEW ENGLAND INNS



Clockwise from top left: Chef Chris Eddy (left) and pastry chef Gilles Ballay; the entrance to Beaver Lodge, one of the more whimsical cottages; wild strawberry and Cavailon melon, a lighter dessert option; the lavishly windowed bath in the Stable cottage.

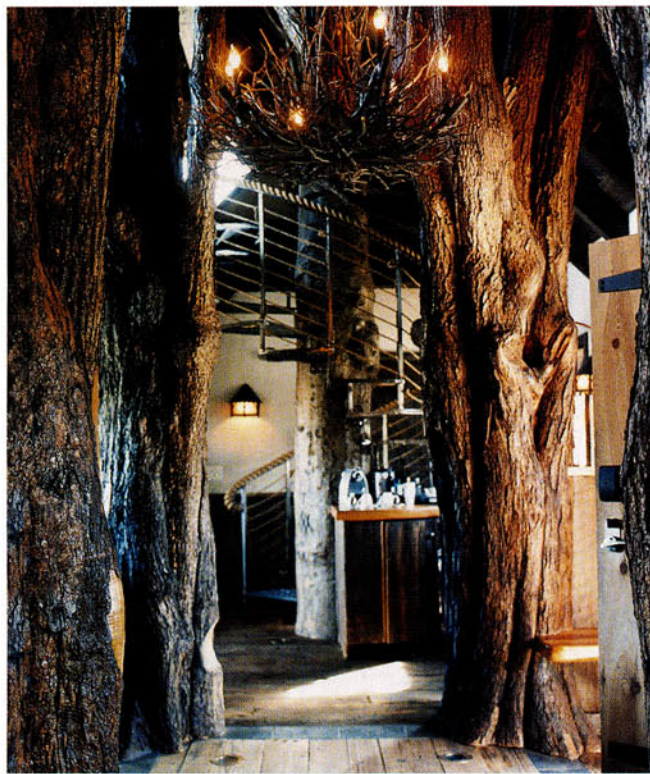






Clockwise from top left: The scoreboard for the vintage table-shuffleboard game; a 1948 portrait of Vivian Smith, one of Winvian's namesakes; Beaver Lodge's porch; the bath in Beaver Lodge, which is filled by a column of water that drops from the ceiling.





**In the Beaver Lodge** cottage (top left), a real reassembled beaver dam hangs from the ceiling, and giant tree trunks serve as structural columns. A tree trunk also forms a bathroom sink (bottom left) in the Woodland cottage. The feeling is completely different in the Greenhouse cottage (opposite), in which the walls and peaked ceiling are made largely of glass.

for the rest of the day—beet, mâche, and Stilton salad for lunch; peekytoe crab and day boat scallops (hold the creamy sauce) for dinner—and find the healthier food just as good. (Our only disappointment is the lack of variety: The menus are the same Friday and Saturday, which is surprising for a place that prides itself on novelty.) But our most memorable culinary moment is Saturday night, when we ask if we can share a single scoop of ice cream. Sure, says our waiter. The ice cream of the day is brown butter. It's sublime—and comes with an unasked-for chaser, two glasses of Sauternes.

As befits a hotel that serves butter ice cream, Winvian's spa emphasizes pleasure, not wellness. "We wanted to have something pampering," says Heather Smith, who is now Winvian's managing director. "We're not a spa with a hotel; we're a hotel with a spa."

The treatment menu is short but sweet: five massages, four facials, a rose bath, and a salt scrub. There's no Ayurveda, no energy work, no chakra balancing. A yoga class is held Saturdays at 8:30 a.m., but it's sparsely attended. I'm an early bird and a yoga fanatic, and even I don't make it (most guests don't make it to breakfast before ten), though spa manager Beth Aleksinas says private sessions are popular.

That doesn't mean the spa is a mere amenity—Smith estimates that 90 percent of guests use it. The leaf-colored building has pride of place, in a location—once the site of the farm's pig pens—that's both central and secluded by trees. That means guests are comfortable walking around in the Anichini robes despite the double-height windows everywhere.

I fall in love with the spa before my muddy sneakers are whisked away and replaced with Sensei slippers. The interior is spa-like—tranquil, expansive, luminous—but doesn't feel like any spa I've been to. There's not a single cliché: no trickling fountains, no bowls of flower petals, nothing Zen.

Still, I'm amazed to learn that its creator, Dave Winkelmann, has no formal design training—he previously worked for a technology company—and that this is his first project. But he's Heather's fiancé, and Maggie trusted her instinct that his passion for architecture would translate into a successful building. (Architect John Martin oversaw the work to ensure that it was structurally sound.)

"We wanted this to be organic architecture," says Winkelmann, meaning a building that harmonizes with its surroundings and incorporates recycled materials. The chimney masses that anchor the reception area are fieldstone handpicked from old walls in these *continued on page 138*





# Inn Souciant

Continued from page 111



**Standout therapist** Stan Wiacek (above). The Charter Oak cottage (below) has the trunk of an imposing oak tree inside it as a decorative element.

woods—"if you look closely, you can still see the green from the mosses that grew on them"—and the ceiling is barn siding salvaged from Ohio, its patina lustrous and silvery. He chose hickory for the floors because of its rustic look, and hung a wood chandelier overhead. The walls are largely windows, the largest 11 feet high, because "you can't have a good building without a lot of windows."

Even so, it's not just a celebration of the bucolic (though I do see ten wild turkeys right outside the relaxation room Sunday morning). The weathered materials and forest views commingle with contemporary furnishings: white midcentury sofas, slouchy bean-bag-esque gray chairs, vivid orange and green cast-rubber end tables. Two couple's nooks are cordoned off with silvery beaded curtains, the kind I had in my college dorm room but looking far more sophisticated here.

While the Smiths took a risk on their designer, they didn't with their products. Body treatments use Ren, a hip natural-leaning British range, and facials use preparations from Eve Lom, a skin-care celebrity in her native London. Lom herself came to oversee the training and select the therapists to give her signature facial, a process Heather Smith likens to *Survivor*: Therapists were kicked off the island if Lom didn't like their touch.

When I have the facial, I can see why. It incorporates a great deal of massage, for lymph drainage and relaxation, and, in Stan Wiacek's capable hands, feels heavenly. After cleansing, he paints my face with hot wax to warm the skin, relax the muscles, and open the pores to make extractions easier. Then he kneads my arms, chest, and upper abdomen, and reaches under my back almost to my waist, pointing out, quite logically, that the face is connected to the rest of the body, and most of the lymph nodes are below the neck. I leave blissed-out and glowing.

The Ren Guerande Salt Body Glow is another triumph—the scrub, a mix of fine salt and Polynesian manoi oil, feels as gentle as sand but sloughs like salt—but the

## WINVIAN RESUME

**Location** Litchfield Hills, Connecticut, about a two-hour drive from Manhattan; just under three from Boston. The closest airport is Hartford's Bradley International, slightly over an hour away.

**Hotel Forte** Cultivating an atmosphere of indulgent play.

**Accommodations** 18 individually designed cottages, averaging 1,000 square feet and each with a distinct Connecticut theme. My favorites are Industry, which has an early-20th-century vibe; Camping, whose big windows make you feel like you're outside; and Beaver Lodge, a rustic-luxe folly. There's also one suite in the original farmhouse.

**Cuisine** Forget about your diet. All meals and most beverages are included in the rate, and the food is indulgent and superb. With some willpower, you can eat fairly healthfully, as special requests are easily accommodated.

**Spa Snapshot** Pampering and relaxation, not fitness or wellness. The standout treatments are the Eve Lom Facial and Tailor Made Massage, the latter with therapist Stan Wiacek.

**You Should Know...** Spa treatments and wines are not included in the rate.

**Rates** US\$1,450–\$1,950, includes all meals and carte blanche at the bars. The entire property can be rented for US\$32,000 a night.

**Reservations** 860-567-9600

**Website** [www.winvian.com](http://www.winvian.com)

standout is Sunday morning's Tailor Made Massage. It's also given by Stan, who earned a master's in physical therapy in his native Poland and has 14 years' experience as a massage therapist. I detect elements of trigger point, deep tissue, reflexology, and shiatsu before I give up being a reporter and just surrender to the sensations, drifting off as he works my toes one by one.

I end up wishing I hadn't scheduled it right before my drive back to New York. But it turns out to be a fitting finale. In two days at Winvian, I've come to expect the unexpected—and expect that it be done well. I found a bright orange rain showerhead in the spa's wet-treatment room, and a bag of dark-chocolate-covered pretzels on my pillow

at turndown. A guest assistant from Buenos Aires told me about his favorite boutiques there, and the Roman food and beverage director introduced me to a delicious South African Pinot Noir. I watched turkeys strut while I sipped spa tea. Perhaps the truly surprising thing about my massage is that it isn't quirky, just top-quality.

ANN ABEL is Luxury SpaFinder's executive editor.

