

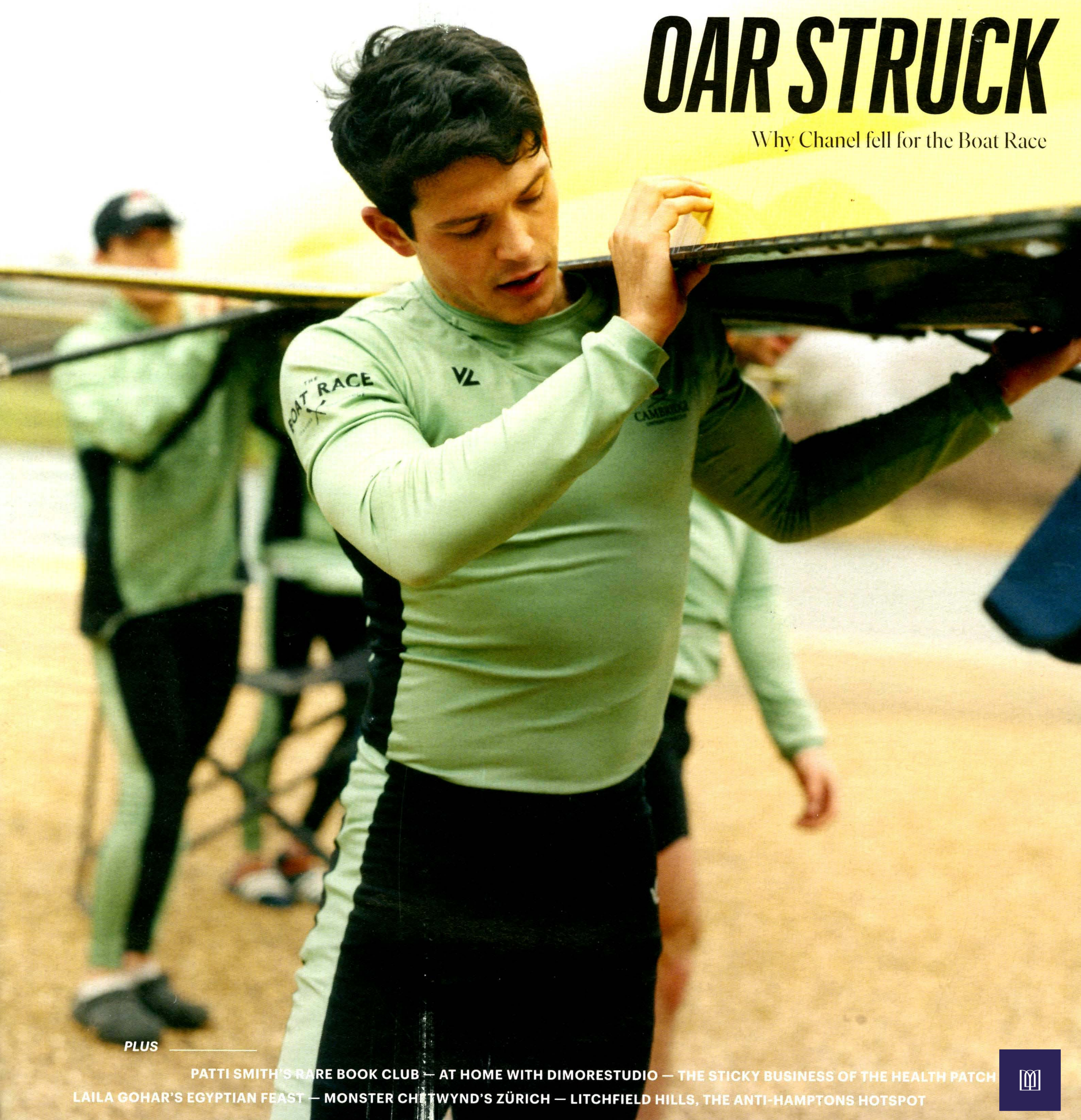
FINANCIAL TIMES

HTSI

5 APRIL
2025

OAR STRUCK

Why Chanel fell for the Boat Race



PLUS

PATTI SMITH'S RARE BOOK CLUB — AT HOME WITH DIMORESTUDIO — THE STICKY BUSINESS OF THE HEALTH PATCH
LAILA GOHAR'S EGYPTIAN FEAST — MONSTER CHETWYND'S ZÜRICH — LITCHFIELD HILLS, THE ANTI-HAMPTONS HOTSPOT





TRAVEL

WELCOME TO THE ANTI-HAMPTONS

Low-key, high-powered Litchfield Hills has long been a cultural haven. *Gisela Williams* reports from Connecticut



MARCEL BREUER'S 1951 STILLMAN HOUSE

The Hamptons: you already know about the East Coast summer destination that's an international shorthand for an enclave of the 0.001 per cent. But drive two hours north of Manhattan instead of east and you'll find a far more discreet haven – one that a certain intellectual-leaning, old-money crowd has for more than two centuries managed to keep almost entirely to themselves.

Litchfield Hills is a bucolic 1,000 square miles in the north-west corner of Connecticut, dotted with Revolution-era towns. Spectacular in the autumn, painted in red and gold foliage, it evinces low-key privilege; sprawling country estates are obscured at the end of long dirt driveways and owned by the likes of arts patron Agnes Gund and fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg. A library is named after early resident Oliver Wolcott, a signatory of the Declaration of Independence. The artist Alexander Calder threw wild parties attended by neighbours Arthur Miller and Marilyn

Monroe here; Marcel Breuer and John Johansen designed a handful of the schools. And everyone drives a Subaru.

A new wave of influential urban creatives and their families has been accompanied by a marked opening-up to the outside world in recent years. There are now three new hotels in and around Litchfield town, one of the region's largest and most historic.

"IT'S LIKE THE GLAMOROUS SISTER OF THE CATSKILLS – A LITTLE OLDER AND MORE REFINED"

Founded in 1719, its postcard-perfect centre, anchored by a leafy green and surrounded by historic brick buildings, is on top of a hill, its four main streets – North,

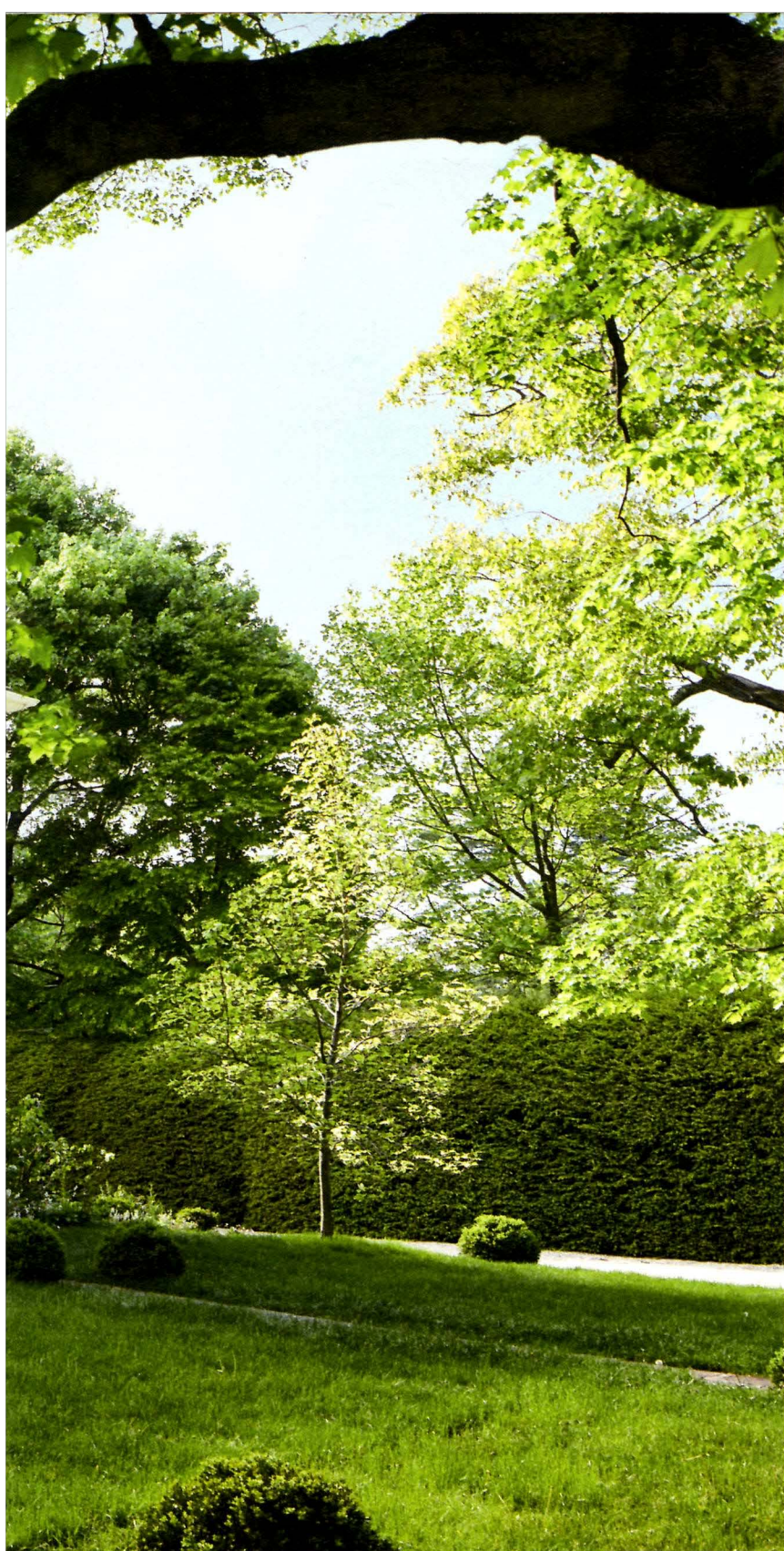
South, East and West – lined with elegant colonial-revival and Victorian mansions.

"It's the best of two worlds," says Anthony Champalimaud. "Historically significant and vibrant with contemporary culture." Champalimaud, a hotelier and investor, grew up in the area; his mother, interior designer Alexandra Champalimaud,

Top left and above: Giancarlo Valle and Jane Keltner de Valle's 1863 home in Litchfield. Right: the tavern dining room at Lost Fox Inn

MUSHROOM TART AT LOST FOX INN





Above and right: Stillman House II, 1966, designed by Marcel Breuer in Litchfield

PHOTOGRAPHS: ARDEN WRAY (2), JOACHIM WICHMANN FROM BREUER'S BOHEMIA BY JAMES CRUMP. © 2024. USED BY PERMISSION (2), STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON/OTTO (2), TIM LENZ/OTTO

and her husband Bruce Schnitzer lived in the Oliver Wolcott residence on South Street he purchased in 1978. Six years ago, Champalimaud junior and his wife Charlie purchased their own 18th-century house on North Street. He says the region has always been a place for established New Yorkers “to socialise, be productive and live closer to the land and community. They don’t come here to peacock.”

In 2017 the Champalimauds opened Troutbeck, a 37-room inn on a 250-acre estate across the border in Amenia, New York. Their new project, Beldon House & Mews, is an exclusive hotel based around a 19th-century Victorian mansion, with 10 rooms and suites, on North Street. In the garden, designed by award-winning architecture practice Reed Hilderbrand, there is a pool and an extension with a further 21 rooms.

Already up and running just outside Litchfield is the Lost Fox Inn, whose buildings include a 1745 tavern. Its restaurant, overseen by Hudson Valley-based chef CJ Barroso, is a major success with the discerning locals. Owners Eliza Clark and Tim Trojian already operate Foxfire Mountain House near Woodstock, New York; they were drawn to the Litchfield Hills, explains Clark, “because it’s like the glamorous sister of the Catskills – a little older and more refined, but equally nature-based and beautiful”.

BACK IN TOWN, the old 1890 courthouse on West Street reopened last September as intimate 20-room The Abner. The name honours Reverend Abner Reeve, the father of Tapping Reeve, who founded the country’s first law school (it’s just around the corner on South Street).

All three hoteliers were in consultation with Litchfield’s Historical Society; the town was the first approved National Historic Landmark District in the state, inducted in 1959. While conferring with the extremely active 169-year-old institution isn’t compulsory, the new hotel owners were happy to use it as a resource. “Being in the business of history doesn’t mean we aren’t



“PEOPLE COME HERE TO BE PRODUCTIVE. THEY DON’T COME TO PEACOCK”

interested and engaged in what is happening in our community today,” says Jessica Jenkins, the society’s executive director.

Litchfield’s second creative wave began arriving around two decades ago. New Yorkers and others were drawn by the radical midcentury architecture movement sparked by Litchfield industrialist Rufus Stillman and his wife Leslie: in 1949, inspired by Marcel Breuer’s model house in the garden at MoMA, they invited the Bauhaus-trained architect to build a house off North Street. Between 1950 and 1953, Breuer added a studio building and a pool, with a mural wall created by Stillman’s friend Alexander Calder. Soon after, Breuer’s contemporary John Johansen, a fellow Harvard Five architect, built a neighbouring house for the Huvelle family.

Today both houses are owned by the art consultant Ed Tang, son of the late Sir David Tang, and his partner John Auerbach, CEO of Pharrell Williams’s digital auction house Joopiter. “When I first moved to New York [from Hong Kong], I never thought I’d want to escape from the city,” says Tang. “But when we stumbled across the Stillman House we were completely smitten. I started diving into the stories of Tapping Reeve and Sarah Pierce, who built one of the first academies for women at the end of the 1700s, and of course the bohemians and intellectual who were here in the ‘50s.”





This dynamic midcentury era briefly came to the attention of the mainstream in 2021 with the release of the documentary *Breuer's Bohemia*. It was written and directed by James Crump and produced by his wife, the art historian Ronnie Sassoon, who split their time between a Richard Neutra house in Los Angeles and a Breuer house just outside Litchfield.

"I think about the Stillmans all the time," says Crump, sitting in his house's light-filled open kitchen. "After the second world war, he came back wanting to create a better world for his community and family." Sassoon adds that she thinks many New Yorkers are moving to the area to connect with nature and "breathe fresh air". Among them are newcomers like interior designer Giancarlo Valle and his wife Jane Keltner de Valle, who recently renovated an 1863 Italianate Victorian house in Litchfield; and Abby Bangser, curator and founder of the art-design fair Object & Thing, who purchased a 1930s wood cabin on Lake Waramaug, near the town of New Preston. It's people like herself, Bangser says, that new hotels and restaurants are targeting. She's especially excited about The Pink House, in the village of West Cornwall, already packed with locals and New Yorkers.

Litchfield's new wave also comprises a handful of environmentalists and philanthropists, some experimenting with building sustainability projects on existing

"I CAN'T SAVE THE WORLD, BUT I CAN HELP SAVE MY LITTLE PIECE OF PARADISE"

The movement has benefited the local food scene, which until recently was a bastion of fairly joyless WASP-iness. At the Winvian, a historic estate just outside Litchfield town that in 2006 was transformed into an exclusive resort, the restaurant is headed up by Alain Ducasse prodigy Chris Eddy, who sources produce from its own gardens. The late New York-based Anne Bass made decades' worth of investment in the area; her passion project, the Rock Cobble Farm, continues to be overseen by her estate and supplies two restaurants in South Kent, the elegant Ore Hill and the more casual Swyft. Steve Shabet, a former hedge-fund COO,

farms — a continuation of the work of early-20th-century progressive gentleman farmers, who bought up large plots of land and turned them into working country estates.

supplies his hugely popular The Smithy Market and Cafe, located in New Preston, with produce from his farm, Sunny Meadow in Bridgewater. "I am hyper-local when it comes to conserving the environment," he says. "I can't save the world, but I can help save my little piece of paradise."

NOT FAR AWAY, the investor Rosemary Ripley (daughter of the late ornithologist and Smithsonian Institution secretary Sidney Dillon Ripley) has evolved part of her family's former estate into the Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy, which recently rewilded a neighbouring meadow and wetland, adding a walking trail. But the most low-key glamorous of them all may be Arethusa Farm, a dairy farm purchased in the 1990s by Anthony Yurgaitis and the late George Malkemus — director of Manolo Blahnik USA — and turned into an artisanal creamery and cheesemongers, with a restaurant and two cafés.

On the estates of Litchfield, whether midcentury or Mayflower-descended, and on the food scene, the pottery made by the local artisan Guy Wolff, produced at his 18th-century workshop in Bantam, is ubiquitous. The seventysomething Wolff, who was discovered in the '90s by Martha Stewart, was a close family friend of Calder. His elegant vessels are all stamped with "G Wolff" and a number that signifies the "wet weight" of the clay, a standard used by Victorian-era potters.

Wolff has stayed in the Litchfield Hills, he says, because for him the region is an endless source of inspiration. "The artists who worked here, like Sandy [Alexander Calder], were seekers of beauty and truth, and strove to make beautiful things," he says. "If one does the same, like I try to do, people sense it. These days, we are hungry for things that are honest." ■HTSI



DISHES AT THE PINK HOUSE RESTAURANT



Above left: a room at The Abner on West Street (above right). Left: The Pink House in West Cornwall

HOTELS

The Abner From \$225, theabnerhotel.com
Belden House & Mews From \$500, beldenhouse.com
Lost Fox Inn From \$400, lostfoxinn.com
Mayflower Inn & Spa Reinvented a few years ago by Celerie Kemble, it has an extensive spa and restaurant. From \$990, aubergeresorts.com/mayflower
Winvian Restaurant and spa open to non-guests. From \$860, winvian.com

RESTAURANTS

Arethusa Farm arethusafarm.com
Ore Hill & Swyft orehillandswyft.com
The Pink House thepinkhousect.com
The Smithy Market and Cafe thesmithymarket.com; cafeat9main.com
Stissing House A charming 18th-century inn just over the border in New York State; worth the drive for excellent tavern fare overseen by Clare de Boer. stissinghouse.com

SHOPS

Guy Wolff Pottery guywolff.com
The Hickory Stick Bookshop An independent bookstore that often hosts events with local authors. hickorystickbookshop.com
Oliphant Design Gifts and clothing; very Palm Beach meets New England preppy. oliphantdesign.com
Privet House A cultish home emporium in New Preston selling vintage furniture, books, gardening accessories, Belgian linens and Trudou candles. privethouse.com