

REVIEW:

Belden House & Mews

A restored mansion hotel backed by exemplary design pedigree in historic Litchfield



Reviewed by **ARATI MENON**

Why book

Bucolic **Litchfield**, in the northwestern corner of **Connecticut**, has never really been short of fans, but if you're looking for fresh reasons to visit, consider Belden House & Mews. A colonial revival mansion that's been reimaged into a 31-room hotel by the highly regarded Champalimaud Design, it both holds a mirror to Litchfield's historical design legacy and is a bit of a destination in its own right.

Set the Scene

While Belden House is set back some from the busy village center, this is very much a high-street, center-of-town hotel. However, once inside, that barely matters because you're transported into another world. The main manse, the locus of attention, was built in 1888 in the Queen Anne revival style but has been outfitted with a more chic, age-defying identity that bridges its historic charm with the more clean-lined modern aesthetic of the 1959 Mews building at the back of the property that holds the rest of the rooms. In its formal drawing room, dressed in shades of dusty pink, buttery yellow, and lichen-green, couples and small families gather on curved bay window seats for preprandials and hushed chatter, before heading towards the dining room and what is the piece de resistance of the property: a striking acid-green bar anchored by a large ceramic cheetah lamp. On my first evening, I was drawn to this beguiling corner like a moth to flame, where I joined a local couple who said they were thrilled to have an upscale but intimate date-night spot in town. My first order—a rhubarb Negroni—was a serendipitous win, and one I returned to through my stay. Across the living room, and behind a velvet drape, sits a private dining-room-slash-library in the most delectable shade of pink and anchored by a tiered silk Fortuny chandelier. Of all the common spaces, this one, with its melange of objects—books, lamps, and historical ephemera—is closest to the collectibles-filled design ethos of sister property **Troutbeck**.

Backstory

Belden House is designed by AD100 firm Champalimaud Design that's loved for its stylish panache, and is behind hotels like [Raffles in Singapore](#), the [Beverly Hills Hotel](#)—and Hudson Valley-favorite Troutbeck, a historic manor on a river-run estate in Amenia. Alexandra Champalimaud is a longtime Litchfield resident, as is her son and Belden owner Anthony, who relocated from [New York](#) some 10 years ago. In restoring the previously derelict property, the Champalimauds have contributed to a fresh burst of hospitality energy in Litchfield, joining two other new properties (also occupying revived old spaces), the Abner and Lost Fox Inn. In reinvigorating the mansion and the mews, the design team, which included architecture firm PBDW, has meticulously restored original fireplaces, bay windows, stately pocket doors with glass knobs—even dumbwaiters—but with an eye on more contemporary craftsmanship. Guests to Belden will be treated to the works of local artists: the bespoke sconces and lamps in delicious glazes come from Dumais Made; the tactile grasscloth wall coverings are made by Twenty2 wallpaper; the flowers are from beloved local nursery White Flower Farm; and so on.

When I visited in May, work was underway on the third pillar of the property, a 1891-born firehouse which, when it opens in the fall of 2025, will become available for social gatherings or business events. A National Historic Landmark, the brick-clad Firehouse is connected to Belden by a footpath behind the Mews or can be accessed from the village green.

The Rooms

In picking a room in the main house, of which there are 10, or in the mews, you're essentially choosing between a more contemporary environment or a more textured one. The mews, at the back of the three-acre property, is a modernist addition with 21 guestrooms, some with private terrace gardens that have just been planted. Here, you will find clean-lined four-poster beds, modern seating, Vitsoe shelving—it is still elegant but far more linear. We stayed in a spacious one-bedroom suite on the second floor in the North Street-facing corner of the main house, and a quick dash up the grand staircase from the restaurant and bar. The space was full of reminders of past lives: a nook revealed an original dry bar now lined with wallpaper and holding snacks and drinks; two roaring fireplaces with original tile hearts; and a light-filled living room came with a lovely bay window. Still, amid the preserved details and lush palette, were plenty of modern conveniences: Wildsmith products in the bathrooms, heated floors, Tivoli speakers, and Frette linens. And while the suite is bathed in a soft light by day, it is by night that it really cocoons: Retreat into the living room and sink into a tufted velvet chair with a pour of the house-made espresso martini or flick on the fireplace in the room and climb into the four-poster bed with a book by the soft glow of your bedside Dumais Made lamp.

To turn it up several notches, you might want to consider the 2100-square-foot penthouse suite. Here three gorgeous bedrooms are tied together with large living spaces (all of which are charmingly tucked under the mansion's turrets and gable roof)—and a private terrace for sundowners or early morning yoga, whichever way you swing. The kitchenette is serviced directly from the restaurant kitchen via a dumbwaiter, and as with all the rooms, butler service is available 16 hours a day.



Food & Drink

Mealtimes are enjoyed in the serene and sophisticated dining room with its tiled fireplace, striped banquettes, Josef Hoffman dining chairs, and ceramic sconces by Brooklyn-based lighting design studio In Common With. The menu is helmed by Tyler Heckman, a Connecticut native who cut his teeth in New York, and is elegant and thoughtfully sourced but approachable. Dinner standouts included New England oysters with a horseradish jam, agnolotti with pistachio and saffron, and halibut with summer beans lifted by kafir lime—all best accompanied with one or more of the excellent libations fashioned from locally distilled spirits and seasonal ingredients by bartender Michele Alfonso. For breakfast, you'd do well to order the sweet potato pancakes with its rockpool of spiced brown butter or the granola and berries served with yogurt sourced from nearby Arethusa farm. A smaller menu (lobster roll; chowder; salad) is available to order in the room as well as by the heated pool tucked into the back of the property. For groups of six to 10, the library offers a private dining space that can be booked ahead.

There are several options for dining out in the town, starting with the restaurants and cafes that flank the village green a two-minute walk away. That's also where you'll find the Abner, another new boutique hotel repurposed from the town's old courtroom that boasts a rooftop with cocktails and views as well as a modern tavern-style restaurant. In the town of Bantam, grab an ice-cream or milkshake from Arethusa Creamery attached to a small dairy plant in the historic Bantam firehouse; (the owners also run Arethusa al tavolo, a complete "*dairy-to-table*" experience)—or coffee and salted chocolate chip cookies from Krafted Brew Lab, a haven for coffee purists. Right by Bantam Lake sits West Shore Seafood, where we spent an afternoon playing lawn games with lobster rolls and rum punches for company. In New Preston, a short drive away, Smith Cafe's offers excellent sandwiches and smoothies best enjoyed on benches in the sun. For dinner, there's Pink House where the chef, with experience at Michelin-starred restaurants, dispenses craft cocktails and thoughtful, seasonal dishes. Or Community Table, where the ingredients are locally sourced and the vibe is spirited—and the chances of running into cool locals are high.

The Service

Much like in Troutbeck, the service at Belden House is polished and attentive. The staff here are available to attend to any needs but step back to give you space and privacy—so don't expect always-on coddling. The butler service, available 16 hours each day is a lovely touch.

The Neighborhood

Litchfield, which boasts pristine landscapes and beautifully preserved homes and estates in similar colonial and colonial revival styles to Belden, is on the national register of historic places and has a slew of firsts to its name including the nation's first law school and one of the country's first schools for women. Less known is its more modern underpinning: dozens of striking mid-century modern buildings designed by some of the era's most prominent architects, including Bauhaus architect Marcel Breuer. Not surprisingly, Litchfield county—which you should think of as a chain of villages, and not just Litchfield town, which is its beating heart—has long attracted wealthy tastemakers to set up home. The pandemic, however, brought an influx of inventive young creatives who've now opened design studios, shops, and restaurants, signaling a new era for the region. For design lovers, the green holds treasures like Milton Market, a chic home goods and gifts store (think vintage transferware and blockprinted linens) that also stocks many local artists and Jeffrey Tilou that specializes in 18th and 19th-century American furniture and folk art. You cannot miss Dumais Made, a ceramics and lighting studio in nearby Bantam. And more treasures



await in nearby towns like New Preston and Falls Village that have shops filled with both antiques and local craft. No visit to Litchfield is complete without a visit to The White Memorial Conservation Center, and in particular, the Little Pond Boardwalk, an elevated walkway that allows visitors to experience the wetland environment. Definitely fit in the Topsmead State Forest where you can tramp about the extensive grounds surrounding the erstwhile summer residence of Edith Morton Chase, a local philanthropist. Check for tours of her Tudor Revival home and the English-style garden filled with holly, lilac, and juniper bushes. If you have more Modernist leanings, check out the Oliver Wolcott Library's new wing, designed by Eliot Noyes, a member of the Harvard Five or The Litchfield High School designed by Marcel Breuer; the Intermediate School next door was designed by John Johansen. A gem in these parts is the Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy with over 90 species of water birds—elegant swans and screaming geese abound, as do migratory visitors like the spectacled Eider—across pristine greens. Remember to give the birds their space: some have vivid personalities.

The Spa

Behind the Mews room sits the Bathhouse, where much like at Troutbeck's wellness barn, there is a small gym with NOHrD equipment (that almost looks too handsome to use), dry sauna, steam room, hydrotherapy and cold plunge and treatment rooms for skin and body treatments using British-made Wildsmith products. Some of the treatment rooms open directly into the wet areas, which is a thoughtful design detail. I decided to do the "circuit": a dry sauna, a scrub, an ice cold shower (I screamed), and a steam. I wish I could say I also made use of the heated pool across the path, but the weather played spoilsport for much of the time we were there so I had to be content with looking on longingly at what could've been.

Families

Belden House & Mews and its accompanying restaurant, welcome children ages 12+. Ask for rooms with interconnecting doors; larger groups should consider the penthouse suits that's less hotel and more like the home you wish you had.

Accessibility

The property offers two ADA-accessible guestrooms, one on the ground floor of Belden House and one in the Mews. The public spaces, including the dining room, of the property are all ADA-accessible.

Anything else to mention?

Belden House is a very different experience from Troutbeck, which is more a rural estate. The Champalimauds hope that guests will see the charm in staying at both, given they are just 40 minutes apart. I'd recommend starting at Belden and soaking in all that Litchfield County has to offer before heading to Amenia and spreading yourself out over Troutbeck's 250 acres of formal gardens, woodlands, and pastures.

