

TRAVEL

This fall, Litchfield is in the limelight

New hotels and restaurants are helping breathe new life into a classic town.

By **Diane Bair and Pamela Wright** Globe Correspondent, Updated September 18, 2025, 12:56 p.m.



The Belden House & Mews has a spa with a thermal area including sauna, steam, and ice rooms. COURTESY OF BELDEN HOUSE & MEWS

LITCHFIELD, Conn. — Litchfield is having a moment. In the past year, three new luxury boutique hotels and several new restaurants have opened. That's a lot for a small town tucked away in the northwest hills of the Nutmeg State. Litchfield? We knew little about the town, but our interest was piqued. And what better time to visit than fall, when the pace slows and autumn foliage is on show?

It turns out that Litchfield, founded in 1719, is a thriving hilltop community, filled with well-preserved, elegant Colonial, Georgian, and Federal-style buildings, and surrounded



by nature preserves, forests, and parks. It's also not the first time the town has been in the limelight. Located at a strategic point on the road between New York and Boston, Litchfield played a key role during the American Revolution. Away from the coast and major battlefields, it was a safe place to store supplies and munitions. It was an important rest stop for the Continental Army, and local farms provided food for the soldiers, including Washington's troops. According to the Litchfield Historical Society, George Washington stayed in Litchfield at least two times during the war, where he likely met with Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge, head of Washington's famous network of spies. Litchfield also housed prominent prisoners of war, including Loyalist William Franklin, the former Royal Governor of New Jersey and Benjamin Franklin's son, who was jailed in Litchfield for eight months in 1777.



Don't miss out on the fall views in Connecticut. COURTESY OF VISIT CONNECTICUT

After the Revolution, Litchfield became a thriving commercial and cultural center, home to several mills, merchants, blacksmiths, and other small industries. In 1792, Judge Tapping Reeve started the country's first law school here and Sarah Pierce founded the Litchfield Female Academy, considered one of the most important institutions for female education

in the United States. By the early 1800s, Litchfield was the fourth-largest settlement in Connecticut and nationally known for its educated and cultured community.

Eventually, the schools closed; the railroads came but bypassed the town, and Litchfield, like so many towns, slipped quietly into the shadows (and into disrepair). Fast forward: Historic buildings and elegant homes have been renovated and restored, and the close-knit community welcomes visitors with a host of lodging and dining options, a cluster of one-of-a-kind shops, and plenty of choices for outdoor recreation.



The recently opened Belden House & Mews in Litchfield, Conn., has an outdoor pool for guests. COURTESY OF BELDEN HOUSE & MEWS

We checked into the recently opened [Belden House & Mews](#), a high-end luxury hotel, within easy walking distance of the handsome village green, shops, and restaurants. Housed in an 1888 Victorian mansion, it was redesigned by the well-regarded Champalimaud Design studios, whose work has included the Newbury and Mandarin Oriental hotels in Boston, St. Regis in New York, the Bellagio Spa Tower in Las Vegas, Raffles Hotel in Singapore, and Ritz Carlton in Grand Cayman.

At the Belden House & Mews, the designers succeeded in blending old and new in a refined but colorful and sometimes playful fashion. Original details of the elegant mansion



abound, including pocket doors with brass pulls, the main staircase, parquet floors, stained glass windows, moldings, fireplaces, glass chandeliers, sconces, and more. In the main lobby, the original stone fireplace is etched with a theme from “Macbeth”: “Come what come may, Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.”



The Belden House & Mews is a high-end luxury hotel, housed in an 1888 Victorian mansion in historic downtown Litchfield, Conn. PAMELA WRIGHT

The airy and bright living room has comfy, puffy couches in neutral hues and built-in seating around the curved turret bay window. There’s a cozy library room off the lobby, small but decked-out fitness room, spa with a thermal area including sauna, steam, and ice rooms, seasonal outdoor pool, and lawn court.

There are 31 rooms and suites, 10 in the main house and 21 in the separate Mews building tucked behind the original home. The rooms in the main house are all unique but feature custom wallpaper, handmade four-poster beds by Litchfield County woodworker Ian Ingersoll, and modern baths. The rooms in the motel-style Mews take on a more modernistic vibe; they’re calm and Zen-like, each with a private terrace.

It was impossible not to gravitate to the tiny, bright, chartreuse-colored bar, with a zinc countertop and a fun cheetah lamp. The bar is adjacent to the restaurant, located in the original dining room, where executive chef and Connecticut native Tyler Heckman showcases seasonal ingredients with flair. We dined on hunks of sourdough focaccia slathered with Koji butter, fettuccine with peekytoe crab, and dry-aged duck served three ways.

The following day, we visited the newly opened [Abner Hotel](#).

“It’s a beautiful day, just enjoy it,” Chris Alvarez, manager for the Abner Hotel, said as he walked us into The Verdict, its rooftop bar. We couldn’t have been happier. The spacious bar has a fun vibe, lots of seating, and views of the Litchfield Hills in the southern Berkshires and the surrounding countryside, ablaze with fall color. We enjoyed cocktails and the panoramic vistas.

Designed by Salt Hotels’ co-founder and chief creative officer Kevin O’Shea, the 20-room Abner Hotel is located in the historic 1888 Litchfield County Courthouse, smack dab in the center of town. Many original details remain, including woodwork, refinished flooring, walk-in safes, and the old judges’ benches and jury boxes have found new life as banquette seating in the restaurant and reception desks. The spaces are light and airy with a rich ochre color palette, inspired by vintage legal books discovered on-site, with black accents. There’s original contemporary artwork throughout, mixed with found pieces. The rooms are all unique, bright, and contemporary, with a mix of custom, vintage, and new furnishings, and are intentionally TV-free.

We loved The Courtroom, the hotel’s signature restaurant, housed in the original historic courtroom, with soaring ceilings, large, restored windows, and a palette of warm whites and grays with pops of black, marble, and green. We dine on roasted beets with whipped feta cheese, and garlic maple whiskey chicken bites, followed by seared branzino and bangers and mash. Delicious!

The [Lost Fox Inn](#), once a 1740s tavern, is located a few minutes’ drive from the historic center. Surrounded by stately trees, it’s a peaceful oasis, blending its original Colonial



charm (woodworking, fireplaces, stone, and brick work) with modern furnishings. The on-site tavern and restaurant are wildly popular for good reasons; it's a convivial spot offering upscale pub grub, like shepherd's pie, fish and chips, and steak frites.

It's pleasant enough to hang around town. The [Litchfield History Museum](#) has displays on the history of Litchfield, and the Litchfield Historical Society offers a self-guided walking map of historical places throughout town.



It's impossible not to gravitate to the tiny, bright, chartreuse-colored bar at the Belden House & Mews in Litchfield, Conn. PAMELA WRIGHT

There's a cluster of shops worth popping into, including [Hope and Honey Boutique](#) for unique women's apparel and accessories, and [Lawrence Jeffrey Estate Jewelers](#) for antique jewelry. The gorgeous [White Flower Farm](#), a family-owned garden center, is just up the road in Morris, and a must-stop for garden lovers.

There are also restaurants, more than you'd expect in a small town. Consider the long-standing [West Street Grill](#), serving new American cuisine; [@the corner](#), with a large creative menu of bowls, salads, small plates, and main dishes like street corn scallops and Cajun fried catfish, and [The Village Restaurant](#) with appetizers like oyster tacos and crispy artichokes, along with salads, sandwiches and entrees, like meatloaf, eggplant parmesan and pork schnitzel.

One day, we visited the [White Memorial Conservation Center](#), stretching across some 4,000 acres with forests and fields, rivers and ponds, 40 miles of trails, and Bantam Lake, Connecticut's largest natural lake. The preserve is particularly beautiful dressed in fall colors.

We wandered and pondered: Litchfield, we concluded, deserves its current moment in the limelight.