

Victorian Architecture Meets Mid-Century Modernism at This Tranquil Litchfield, Connecticut Hotel

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Photo: Read McKendree



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One sign of “making it” for New York City residents? Leaving.

The ability to decamp to a nearby—yet distinctly more serene—locale is one of the great symbols of success among New Yorkers. But for those who don’t want to settle in one place, the team behind the Hudson Valley’s esteemed Troutbeck Hotel has expanded its domain of luxury boutique hotels to Litchfield, Connecticut with Belden House and Mews.

The three-acre hotel, situated in the picturesque Litchfield Hills, marries Victorian architecture with mid-century modernism. Champalimaud Design and PBDW Architects took great care in maintaining the integrity of Dr. Charles Belden’s 1888 colonial revivalist mansion: a three-story white clapboard house boasting a gabled roof, a sizable covered porch, and Doric

columns—not to mention a sprawling lawn punctuated with white Panicle Hydrangeas designed by Reed Hilderbrand. Also on the property is the hotel's three-wing, garden-side building, The Mews—built in 1959—which offers a more modern kick. Champalimaud Designs brought the mid-century aesthetic inside with wooden furniture and pops of primary colors.

Recently, the hotel has also added the Firehouse to its domain. Just next door to the hotel, the multi-story brick tower, built in 1891, used to house the Litchfield Fire Company (not to mention a gentleman's club), and will now serve as an events space.



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While the hotel preserves the building's history (just off the bar is a framed photo of Dr. Belden and his family, as a thoughtful touch), it is not, by any means, living in the past. The interiors are lively and unique, from the cozy library featuring a welcoming round table by Ian Ingersoll and conversation-starting pottery with distorted faces, to the emerald green bar that looks straight out of Oz. And the rooms are no exception. After arriving at the hotel via their BMW valet service, we were whisked up the winding mahogany staircase to a multi-room suite, complete with a luxe, four-poster

king bed, one and a half baths (the ensuite with heated floors), and a cozy living area that imbued a sense of New England fantasy in every detail, including the bowl of local stone fruit that awaited us. (Undoubtedly the best plum of my life.)



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An air of relaxation extends to every facet of the Belden House & Mews experience, from the bathroom's stock of Wildsmith products to the lush Frette linens on the beds and the house's idyllic front porch, perfect for a slow morning over coffee. Outside, guests can swim in the 50-foot pool and play lawn games during the warmer months, while the bathhouse boasts a (Pilates-friendly) gym, sauna, steam room, and a 225-gallon Ofuro tub. But the highlight was undoubtedly the spa, where my esthetician, Christina, gave me a transcendent facial that left me floating between wake and sleep, and my skin feeling refreshed.

While there's only so much room in the building to stay overnight, the hotel's cozy restaurant is open to the public. Chef Tyler Heckman—whose resume includes New York spots El Quijote, Hotel Chelsea, Ferris, and Toro—oversees the seasonal menu. Recommended by the knowledgeable staff, we kicked off dinner with a light salad of mandolin cucumber and green



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mango, fresh milk curd with charred peaches and fennel pollen. Even the simplest dishes show an impressive degree of thoughtfulness and care: the sourdough focaccia with koji cultured butter was one of the night's standouts. For the entrée, Chef Hackman paired a grilled short rib with bright Rainier cherries and pearl onions. He continued delightful flavor pairings through dessert with a chocolate mousse with tamarind and Fior di Latte ice cream topped with a generous serving of bee pollen.



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For history buffs, the hotel is just a short walk away from some of the town's most interesting landmarks. Just down the street from the property, Market Place Tavern incorporates the bones of the Old Litchfield Jail, which was operational until 1993; it is also a short walk from Litchfield Law School, the first law school in the United States, founded in 1748, and the Litchfield Historical Society. On the shopping front, those with a sweet tooth will thrive at the Litchfield Candy Company, while a secluded boutique called Workshop offers an impressive Issey Miyake selection. The area is also rife with places to hike, from bucolic hills to marshes. For anyone in need of a nearby getaway from New York City that feels like a world away? Consider stepping over state lines to northwest Connecticut.