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The loveliest country escape from NYC (and it's not the Hamptons or the Catskills)

For a slice of New England without the crowds, follow in-the-know New Yorkers to the bucolic enclave of Litchfield County



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Belden House & Mews is a 31-room hotel in a Queen Anne revival mansion Credit: Read McKendree

Though I was born in [Connecticut](#) and went to college there, after I moved to [New York City](#), I never saw the state as more than an asphalt corridor to be endured en route to more desirable [New England](#) destinations further north: Vermont, Maine, Cape Cod. But there were always hints along the way that Connecticut had more to offer.

Then, a few years ago, I began hearing whispers that Connecticut – not upstate New York, or the [Hamptons](#), or Montauk – had become the place to

get away for the weekend. Specifically, city denizens were heading up to Litchfield County, Connecticut's largest and least densely populated county, which sits in the northwestern part of the state, sharing borders with New York and Massachusetts.

As I drove along a winding two-lane road beneath the sculptural canopies of beech trees, passing cheerful, refurbished farmhouses, it was easy to see the appeal. My destination was Kent Barns, in the town of Kent, a collection of historic buildings and barns redeveloped in 1999 which houses galleries and speciality shops. This is where, two years ago, James Boehmer, a New York City makeup artist, and his partner Gregory Fricke, opened the airy, light-filled [Peggy Mercury](#), a combination apothecary, design shop and art space.

“There’s a sense of privacy *and* community here that people seem to seek out,” Boehmer says about the Litchfield Hills, a region with “so many peaks, valleys, hollows, woods, plains and fields that it literally feels like a Disney movie”.

One of Boehmer and Fricke’s favourite places to unwind over a meal or cocktail – or at the spa – is [Belden House & Mews](#), a 31-room hotel in a Queen Anne revival mansion which opened in early 2025 in the town of Litchfield. Its owner is the developer Anthony Champalimaud, who is also behind the beloved [Troutbeck](#) hotel in the Hudson Valley, a 40-minute drive west across the New York state border.

Visitors to Belden will find, as at its sibling hotel, a mixture of fastidiously restored period details and contemporary flourishes overseen by Champalimaud Design, the well-known firm helmed by Anthony’s mother, Alexandra. Like her son, she is also a long-time Litchfield County resident.