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● FIRST LOOK

Mayflower power

Connecticut's most romantic inn is now the region's sexiest spa. ANDREA BENNETT reports

In an age where even the smallest hotels are now considered incomplete if they haven't added the "and Spa" designation to their name, it's not so often that the simple addition catapults them from a quaint country inn to a world-class destination.

But with its new buildings and new destination-spa format — which took three years to come to fruition — the Mayflower Inn and Spa in Washington, Connecticut, has completely recast itself. In the process, it throws down the gauntlet to the spa industry.

THE TRANSFORMATION

Since 1992, when Adriana and Robert Mnuchin rebuilt the Mayflower, a former inn of the same name and, before that, a prep school for boys, it's been one of New England's priciest and best-respected small hotels — equally suitable for couples celebrating special occasions and wealthy types looking for a weekend getaway.

Its 58 acres have been a massive practice ground for the couple's avocations; his is landscape design, hers is literature (the estate's Shakespeare Garden hosts Shakespeare Society events). Three years ago, they enlisted their daughter, Lisa Hedley, a lawyer and filmmaker, to work on the spa project. Next week, Mayflower launches its first weeklong program.

SO WHAT'S IT LIKE?

The cottage-like exterior of Spa House, set apart from the property by a hill and garden gate, belies its 20,000 square-foot size. Unbelievably, 28 guests can use the facilities at one time. When you walk in to the foyer, you'll immediately leave behind the trappings of the outside world, including your shoes (you'll be provided with slippers).

The spa is laid out in a "U" shape, with active rooms on one side and treatment rooms on the other. In the middle is the airy Garden Room, where you must make the difficult choice of

looking out at the pond and the inn's obsessively cared-for grounds, or analyzing the De Kooning hanging on the wall.

The active side holds a mosaic domed whirlpool, pool and a tiled thermal sanctuary (a kind of hammam); four exercise studios; and a rare feature: changing rooms so comfortable and pretty (complete with steam room and amenities), you might get stuck.

Though some might question the logic of subterranean treatment rooms, the spa purposely left the natural light out, opting for a cocoon feeling.

It's a striking contrast from the public spaces, which seem lit from within by slightly iridescent pastel walls, an astonishing collection of Venetian glass vases, and blown-glass art and fixtures from local glass studio, Adeptus.

THE PROGRAM

Prior to arrival, you'll interview with the spa director, addressing issues like what kinds of activities you like; whether you have health issues (i.e. weight, stress, detoxing); what kind of results you're seeking (revitalizing, nurturing, etc.); and whether you'd like to be social (or not).

You'll work out a schedule of activities, which range from fly-fishing instruction, to kayaking, to chanting. All are interspersed with a huge variety of spa treatments, from food reflexology to cranial-sacral therapy.

Spa-goers eat lunch at a long table facing the beautiful garden, with so-called "conscious cuisine" conceived by chef Cary Neff, the man behind the food at the Miraval spa in Arizona, and executed by his protégé, the Inn's Spa chef, Nicholas Martinkovc.

Dinner is in the main house (in the spa-only dining room), where guests wear spa-issue warm-up suits. Some tweaking of the dinner format is still in the process — guests will likely have a private patio exit come summer.



HEAT IT UP: A thermal sanctuary combines the familiar (sauna) with the unfamiliar (piped in chants).



WHAT'S INN THERE: The main building at the exclusive Mayflower.



RANCHO RELAXO: The chill-out area combines classic with modern.

THE LOWDOWN



Room update: All rooms have undergone a refresher, including adding flat-screen TVs. A new building, the Allerton, containing 5 rooms has opened near the spa, bringing the total number of rooms to 30.

Spa access: The spa functions as "destination only" during the week, with access limited to women enrolling in the 5-day programs, which run Monday-Friday. Weekends, all hotel guests (men and women) will have access for a fee of \$100, waived with a booked treatment.

Rates: Rooms from \$440. A weekend spa package starts at \$1,850; the 5-day women's program is \$6,700 all-inclusive; \$7,200 for suite accommodations. **Info:** (860) 868-9466, mayflowerinn.com.