

EARTH DAYS

BEAUTY
HEALTH &
FITNESS



THE GREAT OUTDOORS
BLUE HERON POND ON MAYFLOWER'S 58-ACRE PROPERTY. BELOW, FROM LEFT: THE SPA'S SMOOTH-AS-SILK SCRUB AND SOOTHING SALT SOAK.



FEAR OF FLYING
THE AUTHOR WITH RESIDENT FISHING PRO MATT FREUDENBERG.

above and Beyond," promises the Web site, which my friend Schuyler and I check out before agreeing to a spa retreat in the Connecticut countryside. Between the two of us, we've fled six well-known spas. "A vacation's not a vacation if it's not as nice as where you already live," says Schuyler. "And why do they always have to be in the desert?" That's what Adriana Mnuchin and her daughter Lisa Hedley thought. The Mnuchins already owned Washington, Connecticut's historic Mayflower Inn, a stately five-star destination for romantic country weekends. At the Mayflower, I was told, everything that made me spaphobic has been eliminated: no airplanes, no hunger pangs; accommodations are luxurious. Everything was included: Facials, private tennis lessons, everything. No need to feel guilty about booking a massage. The price? Roughly the same

paradise found

Hopscotch, fly-fishing, and a midnight snack. Marina Rust visits a most unconventional spa.

as the Ashram. "And at the Ashram, they barely feed you," points out Schuyler.

The 3, 4 or 5 day, women-only program accommodates just 28 guests. Spa director Helen Brown calls the week before to discuss our goals and preferences. Schuyler wants to try new things: She's excited about kayaking, fly-fishing, and archery. I want to try new things, too, specifically Thai massage, hot-

stone massage, and lymphatic drainage. They arrange a bike-riding lesson for me. "Any dietary concerns or needs?" I do like to eat in the middle of the night. "What do you like to eat then?" A pork chop. Or yogurt.

SUNDAY

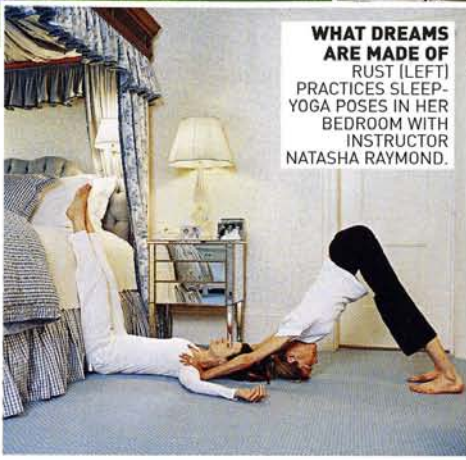
Things turn green and hilly as we drive through arcades of ancient shade trees. We are shown to our pretty, well-appointed rooms. There are thoughtful touches: books that appear to be chosen for us, macs and umbrellas in case of rain, Frette linens. Packing was easy, as the spa provides buff cotton warm-ups. We take a tour of the stunning new 20,000-square-foot spa, probably the only spa in America with a de Kooning. The pool has a view of a field and forest straight out of Narnia. There's something called the thermal sanctuary, sort of a New Age Moorish bathhouse with a

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posh pampering



THIS IS A SPA?
THE GARDEN ROOM (WITH A MIQUEL BARCELO ON THE MANTEL) AND THE SHAKESPEARE GARDEN (LEFT).



WHAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF
RUST (LEFT) PRACTICES SLEEP-YOGA POSES IN HER BEDROOM WITH INSTRUCTOR NATASHA RAYMOND.

music and light show. The treatment rooms are bigger than my first apartment. We join the other guests for stretch-and-release class. I recognize a few faces from Manhattan, or book-jacket photos.

First glance at the dinner menu, I am concerned. Grains and locally raised organics headline each offering. "Millet polenta with Swiss-chard bundles" sounds like deprivation until I see there is chicken involved. "Lobster quinoa with grilled asparagus, pan-seared sea scallops, and truffle corn coulis"? It is as delicious as it sounds. "And would you like a pork chop or another entrée sent back for your snack?" asks my server. When I return to my room, a second dinner is waiting in the fridge. Along with five kinds of yogurt. Above and beyond.

MONDAY

I do 9:00 AM cardio and 10:00 AM yoga. Schuyler meets me at 11:00 for Pumped Up Playground. A boom box blasts ZZ Top while instructors lead us through hopscotch. Chinese jump rope, and Double Dutch, all more fun than I remember them being. Lunch is a buffet of salmon tartines, grilled tempeh, and a salad bar with truffle

vinaigrette, with which I become obsessed. I spend the afternoon getting reflexology and a massage; Schuyler does archery and hypnotherapy. At dusk, a stack of chenille blankets arrives to wrap up in for a walk through the flower garden. As I said, most of the sessions are women only; men are allowed on weekends.

TUESDAY

Fly-fishing or aqua Pilates? So many choices. Despite the lovely beds, Schuyler has insomnia. The spa director recommends that a yoga instructor visit her room after dinner to do sleep poses. She sleeps well that night. One guest calls the feng shui workshop "life changing." I try the harmony facial; my technician is remarkable. "It's amazing."

WEDNESDAY

A gentle rain and croaking frogs. We sit snug on chaise lounges in the

spa's garden room, sipping ginger tea, looking out to the forest. Deer wander in and out of view. It's as if you are a guest at a grand country house. Which you are.

THURSDAY

I've lost four pounds. Inspired, I cancel my manicure/pedicure in favor of a hike.

FRIDAY

Last Sunday, I did not imagine I'd have any part of a three-mile hike. Our guide points to the top of a mountain. "That's where we're going." Alone, I'd have stopped as soon as I was winded. But I press on, huffing and puffing, and am rewarded with a cool breeze and wild blueberries at the pinnacle, a view for miles. At the closing ceremony, Schuyler tries not to cry. There is talk of reunions. "It should be annual, like golfing trips for men," says one guest. "We were in this weird little bubble of perfection," says Schuyler. "Best vacation ever." The staff sends me off with print-out hopscotch instructions, the recipe for truffle-oil vinaigrette, and bottles of Fiji water for the trip home. Now, if only home were more like the Mayflower.

MICHAEL LIENET; garden and interior: BILL WALDRON; Courtesy of Mayflower Spa.