

GARDEN PARTY



The 30,000-square-foot Spa at Mohonk Mountain House recently received a sparkling indoor-outdoor makeover — its first in nearly two decades.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE.

Catskills on a cloud

Mohonk Mountain House's wellness retreat gets an invigorating update

BY JACKIE COOPERMAN

WITH a vibe that's Victorian castle meets forest wonderland, the Mohonk Mountain House was founded in 1869 by the Smiley family, promising guests good health through active engagement with nature — just 90 miles north of New York City.

To discourage indoor idleness, wine was prohibited until 1969, and today's rooms still don't offer televisions. But the bucolic 1,200-acre property — which is dotted with trails, bisected by a 16.5-acre lake and host to a horse barn and thriving garden — lends itself to a sense of escape.

And now its spa is catching up, debuting a renovation by architect Robert D. Henry, its first refresh since opening 17 years ago. In keeping with Mohonk's understated sensibility, Henry did not radically alter what was already so appealing in the 30,000-square-foot space: The heated mineral pool remains, as do the fire-place lounge and multiple verandas with picture windows framing the Catskill mountains. But the renovation freshened the interiors, updated the furniture and added cozy amenities, like its artisan-woven spa slippers.

Most exciting, Henry and the resort's on-site "rustic crew" built an elegant 220-square-foot outdoor treatment room called the Lakeview Summerhouse, where the spa offers massages as well as yoga classes and mindfulness sessions (services from \$300). Designed to mimic the 120 open-air "summer house" structures lining the property's many hiking trails, the cedar treatment room feels like a pristine treehouse. The "Lakeview Summerhouse Massage" takes advantage of the vista, with hand and foot treatments performed on the porch overlooking the lake, followed by dry brushing and deep tissue or Swedish massage in the curtained, al fresco space.

The spa is also introducing an indoor contrast bathing service: a circulation-boosting session in a new treatment room that has its own shower (for quick bursts of cold water) and steam room (for the contrasting warmth). The treatment also includes a massage with rosemary, black pepper and eucalyptus essential oils. The only facility in the Northeast to offer the Swissline by Dermalab skin-care line, the spa focuses on touch, with facialists eschewing machinery and instead providing extensive massage to sculpt and tone the face.

As today's wellness industry buzzes with concepts like "sound bathing" and "rewilding," the Spa at Mohonk Mountain House feels like an authentic reflection of its roots as a 19th century wellness center, on a property the United Nations has cited for "leadership and commitment to the protection and enhancement of the environment."

Nina Smiley, a Princeton-trained psychologist and fourth-generation member of the resort's founding family, has been teaching and writing about mindfulness for more than 30 years. Her sessions (in the new Lakeview Summerhouse, on the property's trails or in one of its private parlor rooms) make meditation accessible to daily life. Smiley teaches in three-minute mindfulness "chunks," fortifying New Yorkers with breathing techniques and a sense of calm that ideally extends all the way from the Hudson Valley to the subway.

WILDFLOWER FARMS RESORT BRINGS NATURE TO FRENZIED NEW YORKERS

BY JACKIE COOPERMAN

THE just-opened Wildflower Farms, an Auberge resort set on a former tree nursery in pastoral Gardiner, NY, is luring affluent urbanites with its luxurious rustic delights. "Last week, this was a loading dock. This week, it's alive," says general manager Manolo Sorensen, formerly of André Balazs' Sunset Beach Hotel on Shelter Island and The Maker hotel in Hudson. "This is incredible. I'm the GM of a hotel, and I have two farmers reporting to me!"

Indeed, the 140-acre property (rooms from \$1,000 per night) boasts a working farm where guests can feed chickens, pick produce and snip fresh flowers. It's tucked in a quiet corner of Ulster County, where Auberge's owners, Phillip Rapoport and Kristin Soong Rapoport, along with their partner Zachary Kleinhandler, have built a high-design destination to satisfy the escapist Instagram feeds of affluent urbanites looking for a tightly edited version of fancy farm life.

Individual cabins and cottages are outfitted with custom furniture and rugs by Manhattan firm Ward & Gray. Each of the 65 units has a private terrace and about half boast fireplaces. Thick bouquets bursting with cornflowers, sunflowers and zinnia sit next to Phaidon tomes on garden design. Bathrooms feature double vanities with inset planters (naturally) and soaking tubs.

The resort also offers a spa with a small saltwater pool as well as two hot tubs. In addition to facials and massages, treatments include Japanese-inspired forest bathing and Reiki led by local healer Tenney Gravatt.

Active New Yorkers will enjoy free weekly yoga, Pilates and meditation classes, dips in the outdoor swimming pool, visits to the playground with boulders and a zipline, plus miles of hiking and bike trails. A charming on-site boutique sells plenty of pretty, pricey gardening accessories for those inspired by the farm.

The outdoors also influence the resort's restaurant, Clay. Chef Rob Lawson (previously of Kaijin in Bangkok) brings Asian flavors and a sophisticated sensibility to his menus, studding salads with lime and ginger, and using Wildflower's eggs to riff on the Japanese custard dish chawanmushi.

"When I told my friends I was moving here, they all said, 'You're crazy, you'll miss the city,'" he says. "At first, it was shell shock, but then I planted seeds with our farmers, and I knew I was in the right place."

Lawson also runs the resort's cooking school, Maplehouse, opening Nov. 1, with classes in foraging, botanical baking (using Wildflower's nasturtiums, thyme and rosemary), and pickling and fermenting. Visiting high-profile chefs will offer cooking lessons and special dinners, starting with Gramercy Tavern's Michael Anthony later this fall.

In its first week, the ambitious property was running at full occupancy. On a windswept early October evening, Sorensen surveyed the guests gathered around a roaring six-foot diameter fire pit, and grinned. Ah, wilderness.



Wildflower Farms (rooms from \$1,000 per night) invites guests to lounge on private terraces, take a dip in the outdoor pool, indulge in spa treatments and feed the on-site chickens.

