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Wonder Woman, Dracula, Cinderella... themes are taken to extremes at the new Roxbury Hotel in rural New York State



Rooms at The Roxbury cover all manner of kitsch, including gothic horror, American pop culture and high fantasy (pictured)
CREDIT: NILS SCHLEBUSCH

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By **Mark C. O'Flaherty**

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I am drawn to a strong, preferably absurd, theme. I have been compelled to dine in a lavatory-themed restaurant in Malaysia (with a doorway in the shape of a giant lavatory seat) and visited Hello Kitty rooms with dubious licensing in love hotels in Japan. It remains one of my biggest regrets that I never got to fly Hooters Air. Too often, I find that the business of theming is half-hearted. The Hard Days Night Hotel in Liverpool, which takes its cue from the Beatles (but skips a crucial apostrophe), stays stubbornly upmarket, with simple framed imagery of the Fab Four and the inevitable cringe-inducing cocktail list (John Lennon's 'ade anybody?). I don't want any of that, I want an animatronic Ringo and a Yellow Submarine swimming pool with Blue Meanie inflatables.

Which is why I love The Roxbury Motel in the Catskills, upstate NY, where every theme is taken to extremes. Husbands Greg Henderson and Joseph Massa left a life in Broadway theatre in 2004 to open their dream hotel project, next to a river in Delaware County. The attention to detail is admirable and amazing. There is a Wizard of Oz-inspired bedroom with a yellow brick road mural that extends into an actual path of yellow bricks across the floor; a Star Trek-styled suite, and another clad entirely in a duplicate of the fabric that Julie Andrews repurposes from a set of curtains to make clothes for the von Trapp children in *The Sound of Music*. I've stayed in several of the rooms on numerous visits, and while I love The Digs – the standalone suite that sleeps six, with leather whips on the ceiling, a Mayan-themed bedroom and a giant illuminated fish tank set into one side of the shower – my favourite part of The Roxbury Motel is Mary Ann's Coconut Cream Pie room. I've never seen Gilligan's Island, so I don't really get the reference, nor do I care. I just enjoy being able to hurl myself on to a round bed covered in lemon-curd coloured linen and white cushions in the shape of peaks of whipped cream, and stare at a ceiling that has been meticulously sculpted to look like the top of a coconut cream pie, complete with crust.



The hotel is set in a relatively undiscovered - and correspondingly peaceful - corner of the Catskills CREDIT: NILS SCHLEBUSCH

• [The best hotels in the Catskills](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/north-america/united-states/new-york-state/catskills/hotels/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/north-america/united-states/new-york-state/catskills/hotels/>)

Henderson and Massa greeted their first guests over Thanksgiving weekend for the soft opening of their new hotel, The Roxbury at Stratton Falls. Work on the project – a short drive from the original – started over two years ago, but they bought the old mansion and its grounds three years before that. If The Roxbury Motel was off-Broadway, this is their Julie Taymor moment – replete with spa and swimming pool. It takes intentional kitsch to levels of luxury I’ve not encountered before. Over the years, I’ve seen big budget jam-on-jam hotels in a range of opulent forms, from the Reverie Saigon to the post-Vegas nonsense of the hellscape that is Dubai, but this is the first time I’ve seen something conceived with such purpose, on purpose. Instead of a Zen-like spa, there’s a Crooked Cabana that looks like a Tim Burton set – the building is askew, as if recently animated. Instead of earth tones and grey, there is lime green – lots and lots of lime green.

There are seven rooms in the Mansion and eight Tower Cottages. The latter house the larger, more fantastical, pricier suites (from \$500/£388 per night). Each has a distinct theme, pulled from the owners’ personal obsessions: overblown gothic horror, fairy tales, all-American pop culture and classic Hollywood. The Superhero Incognito suite takes inspiration from Wonder Woman and Roy Lichtenstein, with an “invisible” plane crashing through the wall, and giant graphics on the wall of a crime-fighting heroine clad in golden bracelets. Cinderella’s Gown incorporates a full-scale set piece of a pumpkin turned into a coach, and an 18ft-long ball gown embellished with hand-sewn crystals that serves as a bed

canopy. There is a Dracula-themed room that is full of black, red and gothic (trompe l'oeil) stone, and a super-glam Thirties-style deco suite, with a winding staircase and sparkling gem-encrusted bathroom and shower. It positively bellows Hollywood. The most extraordinary suite may be Crown of the Pendragons, which is where you come to live out your Games of Thrones fantasies. The highlight is the upstairs bathroom, with an 85-gallon circular bathtub in the middle of a theatrical stone chamber, lit by a crown chandelier with flickering faux candles. This is a hotel for children who never grew up, for anyone who was denied a racing car bed, or wasn't allowed to paint their bedroom Day-Glo.



The hotel has received compliments for being 'impressively vile' CREDIT: NILS SCHLEBUSCH

• [The world's most unusual hotels](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/hotels/articles/the-worlds-most-unusual-weird-hotels/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/hotels/articles/the-worlds-most-unusual-weird-hotels/>).

My home is a monochrome anti-fantasia of Gio Ponti and the Bouroullec Brothers, but despite my love of the austere, I find The Roxbury at Stratton Falls incredible. I adore it, and the original motel too. It is beyond taste. As a friend commented when I posted a shot of the coconut cream pie bedroom on Instagram: “Impressively vile!”

The location of the two Roxbury hotels is notable. This part of the Catskills isn't like the moneyed enclave of Hudson or the other easy-to-reach towns upstate that have been colonised by Condé Nast editors and couples from Chelsea with a penchant for antiques. There are few restaurants and fewer boutiques, but there is natural beauty to burn.

As part of the new hotel project, the trails around the eponymous falls have been landscaped, so you can walk comfortably around it (keep an eye out for snakes). You can

also get married in the hobbit-like structure that's been erected at the highest point. A short drive away, you can take the half-mile hike to the Kaaterskill Falls, one of the most photogenic, secluded highlights of this part of the state. I spent an hour relaxing at the foot of the 260ft falls after my hike, while watching a group of other visitors ill-advisedly clamber over the wet rocks and repeatedly fall into the water. Nothing relaxes me quite like a waterfall, and nothing entertains me quite as much as another's peril. Maybe the guys at The Roxbury could theme a future room on that somehow.

Mansion rooms at The Roxbury at Stratton Falls from \$138 (£105) per night (001 607 326 7200; theroxburyatstrattonfalls.com) (<https://theroxburyatstrattonfalls.com/>). Rooms at The Roxbury Motel from \$99 (£75) per night (001 607 326 7200; theroxburyexperience.com).

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