

Cottage experience

Roxbury at Stratton Falls is a whole new type of Inn



VIOLET SNOW

If you like the idea of hanging out in Galileo's study, Dracula's castle, a black-and-white Jean Harlow movie, or Cinderella's ball gown, you might want to book a night or two at the Roxbury at Stratton Falls. Following up on the success of their themed rooms at the legendary Roxbury Motel, Greg Henderson and Joseph Massa have created eight elegant, fantastical, way-over-the-top cottages for vacationers, next to a 50-foot waterfall in rural Delaware County.

Henderson, originally from Oklahoma, was an actor, and Massa was building sets on Broadway when they got together in New York City. Fifteen years ago they bought, renovated, then expanded a former motel in the little town of Roxbury, concocting rooms that pay homage to *The Flintstones*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and other shows of the 1960s and 70s, the era when the original motor lodge was built.

Five years ago, when the owner of a historic mansion and waterfall, two miles down the road, wanted to sell, he offered it to Massa and Henderson, sending a message, not through mail, email, or a

lawyer, but through the woman who mowed the lawns at both properties. "The waterfall had always been privately owned," Henderson explained. "He wanted it to be enjoyed by people. We scaled the gorge with him, this 82-year-old guy," since there was no trail leading to the falls at the time. At the bottom of the gorge, the prospective owners looked up at the "fairytale-esque" falls and resolved to somehow pull together the financing to buy.

The waterfall seems like the right place to start my tour. Henderson and I walk along one of the newly installed paths to an observation deck, placed to echo the view enshrined in 19th-century post cards. The falls are fluffy, muscular, and roaring with two days of rain and snowmelt. No trace survives of the mills the water once powered or the barrel factory that stood at the top, providing income to Ira Hicks, who built the mansion that Henderson and Massa have been renovating. The themes of the mansion's seven guest rooms, which opened in the weeks following my mid-December tour, are historical, reflecting the Stratton brothers, who first

cleared land near the falls, the Hicks family's butter business, and other aspects of local lore.

As we walk back to the driveway, I consider Henderson's jacket and t-shirt, which match the signature lime-green doors of the motel rooms and cottages, while his orange pants match his glasses frames. "Do you always wear that shade of green?" I ask.

"Pretty much," he answers. "I'm living the brand." Then he opens the door into the first cottage, and we're on the Art Deco set of a 1930s movie, not a speck of color, except for us, in the white, silver, and black rooms. The sconces are replicas of the lights at Radio City. The downstairs bedroom, all white, has lampshades covered in ostrich feathers, with a photo of Jean Harlow in *Dinner at Eight* mounted on the outside of the heat-pump unit that heats and cools the room. The upstairs bedroom sports wallpaper that echoes the curved triangles from the Chrysler building's spire. Next to the enormous bed, Henderson turns the lamp, in the shape of an Erté arching dancer, rotating it 90 degrees. "I have to tell housekeeping to leave it in this position. You can see it so much better."

Although Henderson designed "every inch of the rooms, down to the doorknobs and door hinges," he had never designed anything until he came to Roxbury. On the other hand, in second grade, he did repaint his bedroom black, and while his brothers were out playing football, he was paging through the *Architectural Digest* magazines of his father, a real estate developer. I point out that he and his father now have the acquisition of real estate in common, and he agrees but adds, "This is not about money. We do it to break even. It's about creation and theater. We're giving people an experience that takes them out of everyday life and into a fantasy." The motel was successful enough to justify the financing for the Stratton Falls project, but given the costs, the owners are just making a living.

The next cottage is dedicated to Wonder Woman, with two twists. One, she's been given an extra superpower, enabling her to transform into a superwoman of any ethnicity. Two, we're entering, not a combat zone, but her weekend getaway home. The sconces are shaped like her wristcuffs. The color scheme is red, white, and blue, but understated, with an emphasis on the white, plus an occasional set of red stripes. The downstairs shower stall, which is wheelchair-accessible, is tiled with a portrait of Asian Wonder Woman, in Roy Lichtenstein style, executed by an Italian firm that has perfected the art of making mosaics out of digital pictures. In the upstairs bathroom, the tiles are graced with a Mideastern Wonder Woman, only her eyes visible from beneath a black *hijab*.

I'm afraid I do not have nearly enough space to convey the profusion of meticulous detail, the opulence of the appointments, the crazy creativity that goes into every room of every cottage. By the time I left Uther Pendragon's castle, "the excuse to create the ultimate fantasy bathroom," which fills an entire faux-rock-ribbed second floor with leathery couches, a round porcelain bath, a dragon skull, etc., I felt like I was on an acid trip. It's overwhelming to take in all the cottages at once, but if you live in one for a weekend — well, I can't even imagine what it will be like, but it'll certainly be fun.

A few other things you might want to know. The mansion rooms are now available. A spa, with hot tub, sauna, steam room, fireplace, and view, will open soon. The Crooked Cabana and outdoor swimming pool will open in the spring. The cottages, all newly built, have two bedrooms, each with a king- or queen-sized bed and privately-accessed bathroom. Each two-story unit also includes a sleeper couch, bringing possible occupancy to six; a refrigerator and microwave; a screened-in back porch and second-floor sun porch.

A few more design details I can't resist adding. Cinderella's pumpkin coach, which engulfs an upstairs bathroom, has wagon wheels from an Amish farm, coated in gold leaf by Massa, who built the pumpkin. Dracula's bedroom walls are covered with crimson quilting, like the inside of a coffin, and the wallpaper in the bathroom is patterned with blurred mirrors, since a vampire doesn't make a reflection. And I haven't even gotten to the aliens who may have educated Galileo (they're visible under black-light), or the Michelangelo-style ceiling of battling Greek gods. Etc., etc., etc.++

Violet Snow

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