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Eat, Play, Live It: The Old Inn On The Green, in the Berkshires

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If you visit the [Old Inn On The Green](#) on a hot August afternoon, a glorious sight awaits, a restorative balm guaranteed to banish hot pavement and stifling humidity. Leafy oaks and maples shade the white clapboard Inn's peaked roof and front porches, where deck chairs look over the historic Village Green. Breezes from [the Berkshires](#) waft across the lawn and through the windows, ruffling the curtains. Crickets sing and the kids in the swimming pool (one of the Inn's few new-fangled additions) splash and shout.

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Once we'd arrived and unloaded our luggage, we hopped back in the car for a drive to the [Appalachian Trail](#) crossing, about five minutes away. After an hour walking the trail, stretching our legs, it was back to the Inn for a cold drink, and a lazy afternoon on the porch. What a difference it was from our first visit to the Inn on a wet, grey weekend in late March. None of the trees had budded out here in [New Marlborough, Massachusetts](#) and the grass was brown and matted. The weather had done its work over the winter and the trim on the railings needed a touch of paint. With the garden bare, the Inn was looking its age: 254 years old, in fact. A venerable age, indeed, that saw it from British colony, to proud statehood, to federal nationhood and through two centuries to the current decade.



A survivor, the Old Inn is still welcoming visitors. Originally a coaching inn, built in 1760, the Inn was a stopover on the newly opened wagon road between Westfield and Sheffield. With a tavern, rooms upstairs and a post office, it was a bright spot of comfort in the wilderness. A refuge in a rainstorm and place to stable a horse, it was a warm fireplace to sit beside and a hot, home-cooked meal. But today's visitors, of a different stripe, want just the opposite. Most are trying to escape the city for a weekend getaway in the woods, a chance to enjoy both the outdoors and the Inn's award-winning cuisine, courtesy of Owner and Executive Chef Peter Platte and his wife Meredith Kennard.



But the experience, true to history and unspoiled by nods to the present, includes a history lesson that begins when you step through the front door. Ancient floor boards creak underfoot. Suitcases bump as they're carried up the narrow staircase to the second floor. Each of the five bedrooms upstairs and the six bedroom suites in the adjacent Thayer House," next door (built in 1820 and also part of the Inn), are unique, furnished with unmatched but similar beds, chairs and pedestal tables. The Windsor chairs in the restaurant's three small rooms scrape along the bare floors when waiters pull them out to seat guests in for dinner. And everyone dines by candlelight, but not because it's romantic or atmospheric (though it is, very much so).



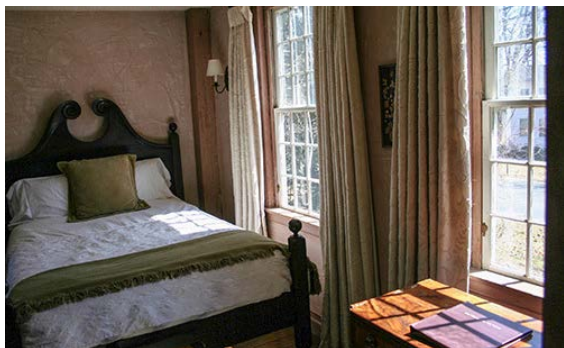
"None of these dining rooms have electric lights," said Steven St. John from Connecticut, a regular weekend guest. Sitting at the adjacent table, he looked over and noticed us checking the six-candle fixture over the table. "I didn't notice it on my first visit," he said, "but it was soon apparent that the dining rooms are lit by candles. It's especially nice in winter, when the fireplace in each room is lit."



Between the candelabra and the fireplace, we had plenty of light for one of the best meals we'd eaten in a long time. The restaurant, a Four-Diamond award winner for ten years now, also deserves its place on the Zagat guide's list of top Berkshire cuisine. The wine list offers a wide range of reds and whites, selected to match the menus. And there's enough light to see the murals on the plaster walls, primitive renderings of local scenes that while painted recently were, I thought, really quite fetching.



The Old Inn building itself, a typical colonial New England structures, is a two-story box with evenly spaced rows of double-hung windows, faced with two covered porches, one on the ground floor and the second just above it. With form following function, it provided maximum interior space, a design that rejected unnecessary decorative flourishes. Like other 18th century inns, it was located near the road for easy access. As I pulled up and parked the car I couldn't help thinking of the thousands of people that had done the same thing before me. And I wouldn't have been surprised if a horse and carriage had pulled alongside, driven by a farmer come to buy ten pounds of salt and to pick up his mail. Downing a pint in the tavern, waiting for the innkeeper's hired girl to dish up plates of boiled onions and venison stew, he'd find himself debating the looming issue: the Colonies' right to self-government and independence from Britain.



But historically quaint isn't the whole story. In the 1970s, the Old Inn's new owners restored the property, keeping authentic features but essential infrastructure. New plumbing was installed, along with modern bathrooms; the kitchen was updated and enlarged. Electricity was run in accessible areas of the house; you couldn't do without it in the bedrooms. Over the last decade, Platt and Kennard continue to improve the property, replacing old mattress and worn upholstery, and changing window treatments. The additions include HD TV and internet connections.

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Curious about Platt and Kennard's other venture, the Southfield Store, we drove over there the next day (about a mile distant) for lunch. A combination bakery, cafe/deli and specialty food store, it occupies a large, plain space, with the store and cafe in front and the bakery behind. We ordered lunch and were pleasantly surprised to find it so tasty, more so than we'd expected. According to Platt, the bakery supplies fresh breads and muffins not just to the Inn but to other local stores and restaurants, doing enough business to keep the store portion running as well.

Customers streamed in and out while we ate and soon the place filled up. We sat awhile, checking the news on our iPad and relaxing, the first time we'd had a chance to stop and catch a breath. Then we went back to our room, put on our boots and went for a walk on a nearby country lane, with the Platt's dog, a chocolate lab named Chapman, trotting along beside us. He knew every inch of the way, of course, but ranged close around, staying cool even when a coyote crossed the road in front of us. Then we drove over to the main town (little more than ten minutes away), Great Barrington, to explore, passing the [Butternut ski area](#) on the way. In the winter, said Platt, the Inn is as busy as ever, with weekend skiers, often with kids, filling the bedrooms.



Great Barrington, which appears as the tourist hub of the region, proved to be a cute little town with a lively main street, brick buildings, a couple of churches, a real estate office or two (or three), several hip-looking cafes and a few gift stores, the kind of shops you'd expect to sell one-of-a-kind gifts. We needed more time to look so added it to the list for next season's weekend getaway. We're considering returning to ski. Butternut, a family area advertised as southwest Massachusetts's best ski resort, is that close. And with the Inn as base camp, we could plan a ambitious Appalachian Trail hike.

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On our last night at the Inn we celebrated with dinner in the restaurant. I tried the tasting menu along with the suggested wine pairings, and my spouse ordered wild Atlantic salmon and a salad. The wine and the food was served promptly and nothing was left to chance, from gleaming wine glasses and warm rolls to extra dressing for the salad. With kudos to Chef Peter, the meal was among the best, most interesting dinner we'd had in a long time, making it the perfect finale to an entertaining weekend. We plan to go again.

IF YOU GO: The Old Inn on the Green is at 134 Hartsville-New Marlborough Road, in New Marlborough, MA 01230. Call (413)229-7924 or go to www.OLDINN.COM. A la carte dinners are served daily except Tuesday. The prix fixe meal is \$75 per person; a \$35 Welcome Menu is served Sun/Mon/Wed/Thurs. Room rates for two, including breakfast, start at \$260; the lodging and dinner special on week nights only is \$249; holiday rates start at \$285.

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