

Getting a loving glow in the Catskills

by Maureen Littlejohn



Deep under layers of mortgage-payment-job-pressure-family-obligation-induced stress, the sparks of romance are still alive . . . barely. It will not be easy fanning them into a flame, but my sweetie and life partner, let's call him Mr. P, and I are at The Copperhood Inn & Spa, and I am feeling hopeful.

The inn is tucked into a valley in the Catskill Mountains, at the foot of Mt. Garfield and Mt. Sheridan in New York State. Wooded slopes rise to a sky as blue as a field of forget-me-nots and, cutting through the property, is the Esopus River; the sound of its gently tumbling water is an endless lullaby.

Copperhood has a reputation for intimacy and fine European dining, but we also choose it because we want to rustle our citified, couch-potato behinds into action and do some hiking, swimming and yoga, plus, I hanker for a facial. "We are not really an inn," owner Elizabeth Winograd-Iwinski explains as we check into the 15-room, riverside rambler. "We provide our guests with the essentials of a healthy lifestyle. People can't just come and not be part of our spa program," she says. Mr. P grimaces. He is probably hoping to spend the weekend watching *American Chopper* while quaffing a few cold ones, but he promises to be a good sport.

At Copperhood, guests may join in a myriad of classes and outings, including water aerobics, weight training, power walks, and Zen mediation. The fee also covers a spa treatment of your choice. Through a set of French doors is a lounge, complete with baby grand piano, leather couches and, much to Mr. P's delight, a TV the size of the Queen Mary 2. Further



down a hardwood corridor is the 60-foot pool and spa.

Our room overlooks the river. The bed is luxe – a queen-size with a silky spread and upholstered headboard; the furniture is ornate, antique reproductions; the carpet thick and plush.

Jumping into our T-shirts and sweat pants, we race downstairs and into the light-filled fitness studio. We sit on our mats, facing a wall of windows looking out on the river and Mt. Garfield. Mr. P eyes me nervously. He has never experienced yoga before. "Close your eyes, breathe in . . . and out. Feel the air fill your lungs," says the instructor. An hour later the city's stress has departed my body. Mr. P actually falls asleep at one point. "You were snoring," I whisper, poking him awake. New York City is a galaxy away.

Next, we explore the health complex. The pool area is pristine, lined with decorative tiles and flanked with a steam room, dry sauna, and Jacuzzi. The gym has 15 stations of Sprint weight circuit equipment, as well as cardio machines. The two-storey, 10,000 square-foot Hanna Kes Spa is light, airy and walled with cool, milky, Travertine marble. Named for Elizabeth's mother, it has seven treatment rooms, including a water therapy suite with Vichy shower, hydrotherapy tub, and Scotch hose. The extensive menu includes hot stone massage, Reiki, shiatsu, gommage scrub, herbal body wrap, acupuncture, facials, manicures, and pedicures.

I book a botanical facial and Elizabeth explains that, although she used to be a psychologist, spas are in her blood. "I was born in Poland. In Europe, spas are a way of life." Whippet lean and fit as a decathlete, Elizabeth – who opened the facility 24 years ago with her husband Lech, the property's chef – is also a licensed hiking guide. Her daily treat is leading guests up Sheridan Mountain. "Our hikes aren't wimpy," she warns. Luckily, she is not embarking on a vertical challenge until the next morning. We have time to mentally prepare.

I head to the spa and have my face thoroughly scrubbed, masked, exfoliated and moisturized with Avancé products made of algae, papaya and pineapple. Simultaneously, my hands are creamed with alpha-hydroxy and tucked into cozies. All emerge soft as peaches. Mr. P visits the weight room. We meet after, refreshed and relaxed, and embark on a self-guided hike of the property's 40-acre island. Kasia and Asia, Elizabeth's two pet goats, meet us after we cross a small suspension bridge over the Esopus. Pawing us like puppies, they trail behind as we walk the winding paths, occasionally nipping on the hem of my coat.

The crisp country air stirs our appetites, and we head to the cozy dining room for dinner. The table is draped in gold brocade, a candle flickering in the centre. Our first course is gingery beet soup, followed by a crunchy green salad with tangy mustard honey dressing, complemented by glasses of crisp Underraga Sauvignon Blanc; the entrée is a roasted Cornish hen topped with delicate citrus sauce. For dessert, we share a decadent tiramisu. Seated next to the crackling fire, Mr P is glowing. He squeezes my hand and says, "I love it here."

Snuggling with me in bed later that night, he does not reach once for the remote. Copperhood's quiet charm and healthy atmosphere has worked wonders. The magic is back.

Travel Planner

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