

A TALE OF *Three Towns*

EACH SUMMER, TWO SMALL VERMONT TOWNS THAT ARE NORTHERN REPLICAS OF VERO BEACH PLAY HOST TO A NUMBER OF OUR WINTER RESIDENTS.

WRITTEN BY EVELYN WILDE MAYERSON

In the spring of each year, usually sometime after the May Pops concert, a tribe of nearly 300 migrating Vero Beachers, of which I am one, empties freezers, puts up hurricane shutters and packs up cars. A few ship their vehicles ahead via transports where Mercedes perch like acrobats. A few decide to save 800 miles and freight their cars in the Amtrak Auto Train while they ride in coach; and some, like Connie and Bob Ferguson, toss their dogs, Sadie and Emma, into the back seat of their Volvo wagon and head north to Vermont.

Our destinations are Manchester Village and Dorset, each town about six square miles, both nestled in a valley between the Green Mountains in the east and the Taconic Range in the west, with Mt. Equinox, the highest of the Taconics at 3,800 feet, towering above Manchester Village like a shield. Side by side, the two towns predate the Revolutionary War and were established as part of the New Hampshire Grants when Vermont was a simple place of unpainted houses, furniture made for people who sat up straight, notch-eared pigs roaming over the village green, and a land subdivided by glaciers into small places within small places that taught colonists to deal with each other, a trait that abides today.





Like our Indian River Lagoon, the streams and ponds of the Vermont mountains contribute to the beauty of the locale.

David Hamman and Bill McMillen, residents of Central Beach where they can walk to the ocean and the theater, compare Dorset to Vero Beach. “Each has a small-town atmosphere,” says David, “where people care about each other.” Ed and Fran Mellett, who have had a home in Vermont for 35 years, echo this sentiment. On the board of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Indian River County, Ed particularly likes the laidback, peaceful feel of his Dorset summer home. “It is what life was like in the ‘50s and ‘60s,” he says, “when you knew your neighbors.”

The last leg of our journey funnels us up the narrow western corridor of Vermont, usually after dark, when passengers and books-on-tape have nothing more to say. It is the route taken by the slaves escaping to Canada before the Civil War and, before that, by a revolutionary force of young farmers calling themselves the Green Mountain Boys on their way to capture the British-held Fort Ticonderoga and its 100 cannons. Led by Ethan Allen, who opted for gold epaulettes, they rested where we will stop, first to take supper at Manchester’s Marsh Tavern whose Tory owner later fled to Canada, then turning northwest to camp off the Dorset West Road in a field called Kent Meadow.

Unlike the Green Mountain Boys who were at least 40 years

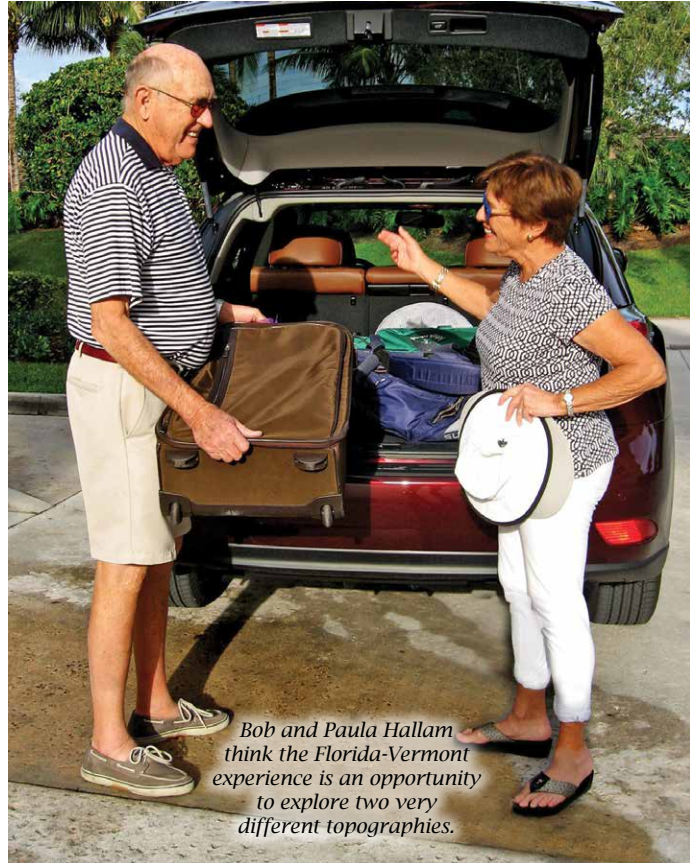
younger, most of us arrive at our destinations with no interest in capturing anything except maybe a crazed squirrel trapped in the attic. Many don’t even unpack until the next day when we wake to a landscape scoured and bulldozed by the last Ice Age into rubble of rocky till, a corrugated terrain that Vermonters say if you straightened out would be bigger than Texas. I am partial to facing east toward the spruce- and hemlock-covered Green Mountains, part of the Appalachian mountain chain that runs south to Alabama and divides Vermont in half and once, in the time of Pangea, formed a line with the Caledonian Mountains in Scotland.

The 2010 census ranks Vermont as the most rural state in the union. With the smallest carbon footprint, it is possibly the greenest, its villages – appointed with steepled churches, close-cropped greens and white clapboard houses – seem frozen in time, the intimacy of their tight containment reflected in their town meetings: one person, one vote, what someone once called government with a human face.

Even after Levi Orvis, a hauler of marble quarried in Dorset, laid down a marble sidewalk in front of his house and his neighbors followed suit and even with the addition of a music hall



David Hamman and Bill McMillan like the small-town atmosphere of both Dorset and Vero Beach where, they say, "people like each other."



Bob and Paula Hallam think the Florida-Vermont experience is an opportunity to explore two very different topographies.

Each year more than 300 Vero Beachers head to Manchester Village and Dorset in Vermont. These two towns are very similar in atmosphere and amenities to Vero Beach, although their landscapes differ dramatically.



Not too long after the May Pops concert, Bob and Connie Ferguson toss their dogs, Sadie and Emma, in the backseat of their Volvo to join the other 300 Vero Beachers headed to Vermont.



Top: This quarry shows the rugged terrain that Vermonters say would make the state bigger than Texas if you flattened all the hills and valley out.



Left: Vermonters set great store on who is native and who is not. Just ask Nora Gordon, a.k.a. Mrs. Murphy, the denizen of Mrs. Murphy's donuts. Even after 30 years of commuting, author Evelyn Wilde Mayerson still can't get a seat at the rear counter of the donut shop.

ELAINE CAPEN

where once Fanny Hoyt of the Hoyt Sisters gave her monologue and The Satsuma Japanese Troop of trapeze artists swung from the rafters, Manchester, like Dorset, remains a simple place.

John's Islanders Paula and Bob Hallam, who regard the Florida-Vermont experience as an opportunity for very different topographies, particularly value what they perceive as the constancy of Vermont. "We leave Florida for a change," Paula says, "to a place that has not changed."

Our pocket of the Green Mountain state offers nothing to do and everything to do. You can swim in the Dorset quarry where the Union got its gravestones during the Civil War, go blueberry picking, fish in a stream that once powered a mill, hold a hooded falcon on your wrist and hope it doesn't know you're there. You can listen to country music on the Village Green, catch an Agatha Christie play at the Dorset Theater or go on a bus excursion with the Green Mountain Academy of Lifelong Learning to experience an in-your-face "Rigoletto" at an ancient, dilapidated opera house where the restrooms are in the basement.

Then there is the Southern Vermont Art Center, a jewel of a museum nestled on a mountain slope that has become a magnet for many of us including George Bryant, president of The Moorings Property Owner's Association and his wife Barbara who were drawn to Manchester because of its art museum as they were to Vero Beach because of its museum of art.

We are not the first summer visitors although it is unlikely that the early Abenaki, who sought the banks of the Battenkill as soon as the land thawed, played golf. Manchester in particular



ELAINE CAPEN



Most of Vermont's hostelrys were adaptations of old houses and taverns. The new Taconic Hotel, shown dressed up for an upcoming wedding, began its life as the Orchid Hotel in 1907.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL GELSOBELLO, COURTESY HEATON COMPANIES



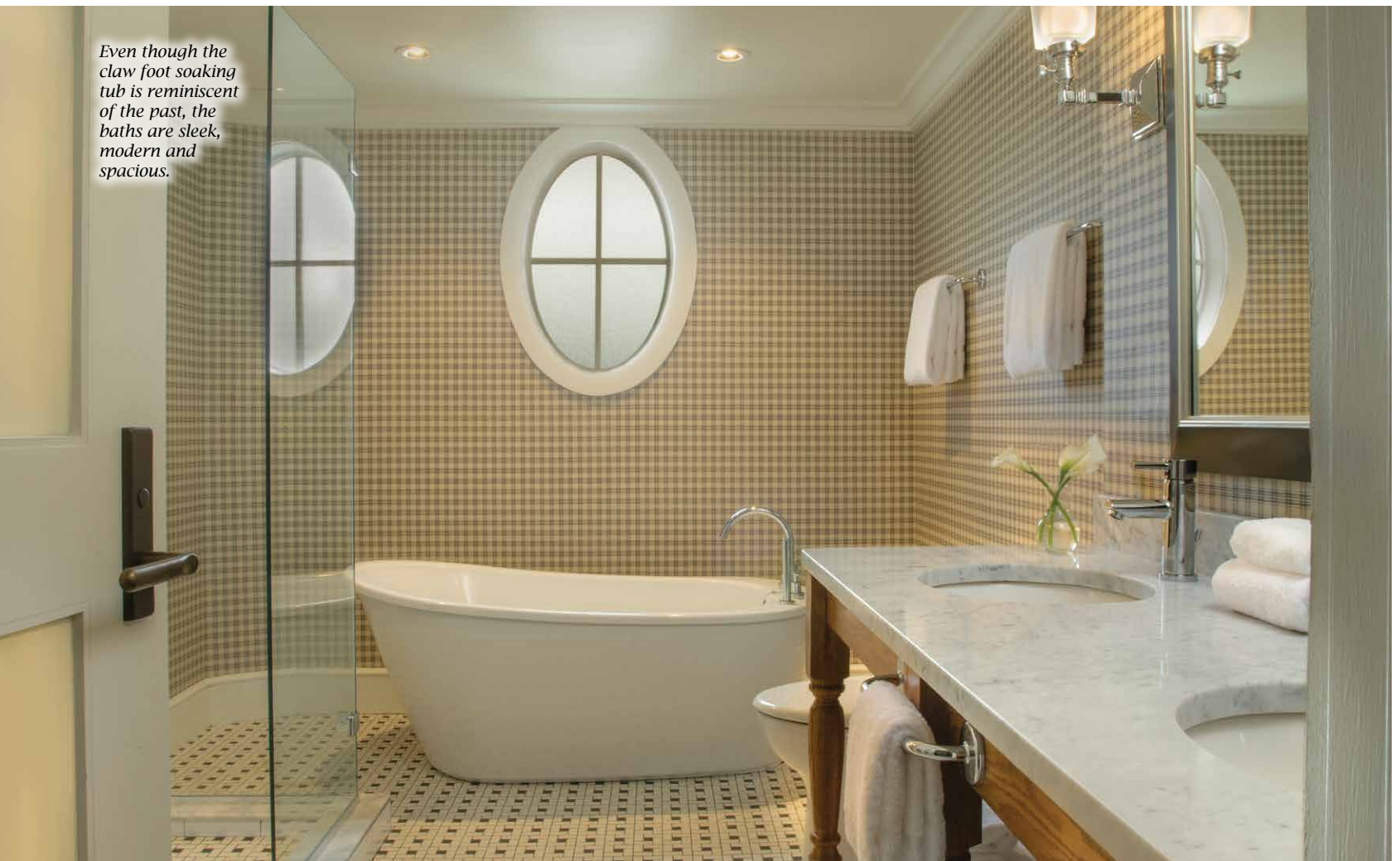
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The Taconic guest rooms offer a relaxing seating area with a view of the beautiful landscape from the windows.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL GELSABELLO, COURTESY HEATON COMPANIES

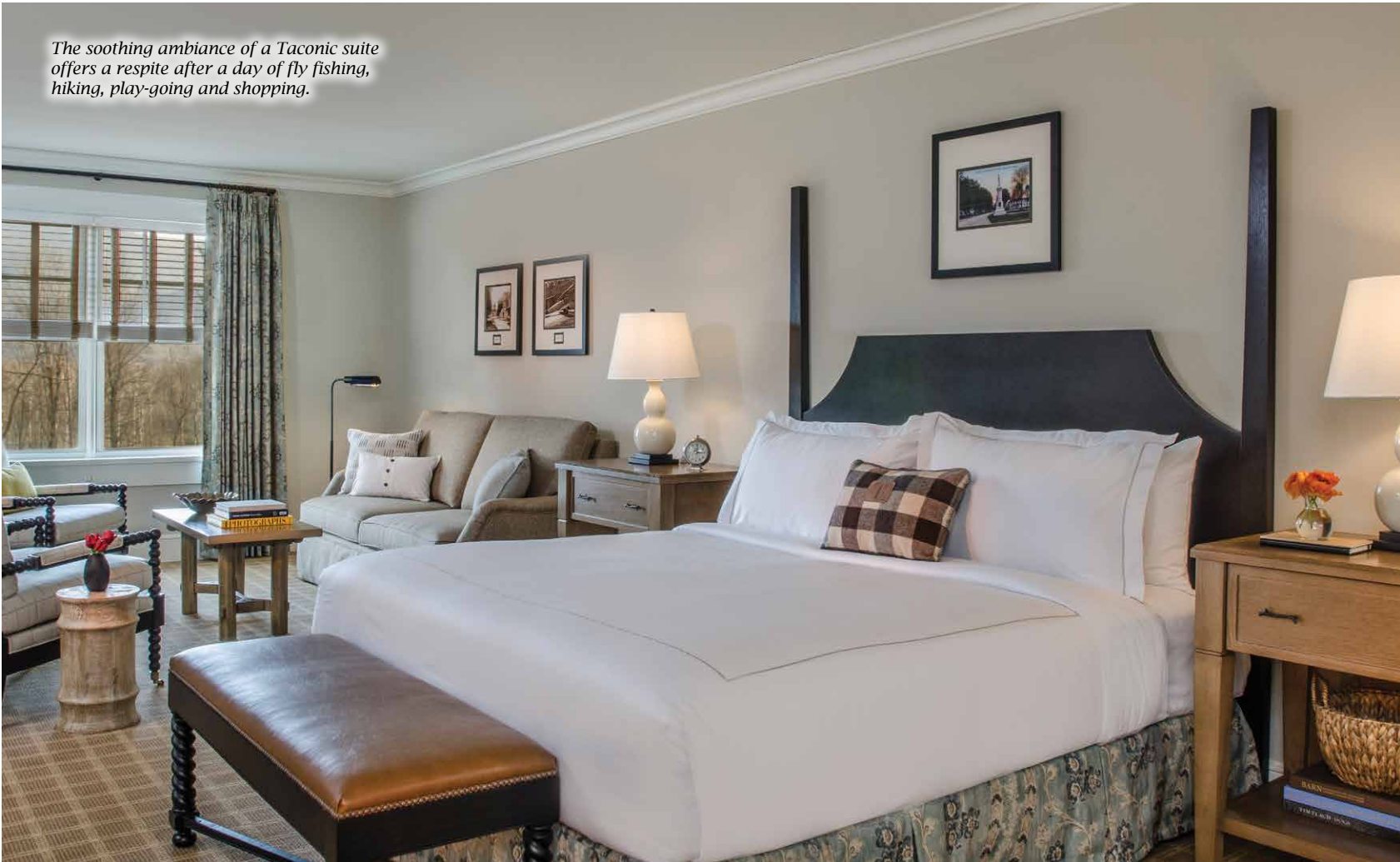
Even though the claw foot soaking tub is reminiscent of the past, the baths are sleek, modern and spacious.



The décor of a typical bedroom reflects the pleasant and elegant furnishings of Vermont's past.



The soothing ambiance of a Taconic suite offers a respite after a day of fly fishing, hiking, play-going and shopping.





GARY MAYERSON

During construction of the new hotel, it wore a blue skin to self-adhere to a substrate and provide a waterproofing barrier.

was known as the “town of taverns” where travelers, most of them men, could spend the night. With the arrival of the railroad in 1852, about the time Levi’s son Charles Orvis began manufacturing fishing rods and hand-tied flies, privileged visitors of both sexes began to travel from New York and Philadelphia by river steamer to Troy, then from Troy by rail for nine hours to Manchester Depot.

A half-century later, Matthew H. Buckham, president of the University of Vermont, was prompted to write of this touring elite, “When the summer people take possession of a country village, importing into its industrious community the habit of doing nothing and doing it elegantly, they undermine the whole of society.”

Buckham’s comment may have been influenced by the great store that Vermonters set on who is native and who is not although the recent yield of 460-million-year-old nautiloid fossils from a limestone quarry in northwest Vermont would seem to put an end to the discussion. It doesn’t matter. Even after 30 years of commuting and my father’s second marriage to a sixth-generation Vermonter, I still can’t get a seat at the rear counter of Mrs. Murphy’s Donuts.

Most of Manchester’s hostelrys, some dating back to the 1700s, are adaptations of taverns and private homes. In one instance, the county poor farm was converted into a bed and breakfast. The home of dry goods merchant Julian Kellogg complete with slate roof and croquet court, said to be the finest house between Rutland and Bennington, was purchased in 1907 by Charles Willard who added a second floor, a 10-foot piazza and a garage for 22 cars, and named it the Orchid Park Hotel.

Willard’s labors were followed by over a century of furnishing and burnishing, of sawing off and nailing on, of name changes and serial innkeepers ending with the last owners who renamed the property the Village Country Inn, then embarked

The Taconic’s lobby sitting room offers a place to relax and read in front of a roaring fire.



PAUL GELSABELLO, COURTESY HEATON COMPANIES





Nick French and his parents Lu and Clark enjoy a moment in the new lobby of the Taconic Hotel over the holidays.

COURTESY HEATON COMPANIES

on renovations until they, too, were forced to close their doors, leaving a row of empty rocking chairs creaking in the wind.

Two summers ago, the deteriorating inn and its abandoned rocking chairs were gone, in their place a crater that looked like it had been dug by the Chelyabinsk meteor, leveled and frosted by summer's end with a slab of curing cement. This past summer, I returned to a fire rainbow of color that you might find in a Rothko painting: orange forklifts, scores of construction workers in yellow hardhats wearing vests of chartreuse.

Add a hamlet of five human-scaled buildings, including three guest cottages, all sheathed in a brilliant periwinkle blue permeable membrane, a wetsuit for new construction called Henry Blueskin UP 160. What was even stranger is that all the structures looked as if they had been there since Levi Orvis laid the first marble sidewalk to keep the dust off of his wife's skirts.

One of our fellow shuttlers, Clark French - no relation to Jeremiah French, the town clerk turned Tory and the largest landowner in Manchester - bears some responsibility for the new Taconic Hotel, named for the mountains behind it. Developer and broker French, a collector of first editions - he has over 4,000 - has homes in both Manchester and Vero Beach and was a local partner

with his wife, Lu, in the venture shared with George Heaton of Heaton Companies and Janet Jiang of First Cambridge Capital.

Discerning curators, the partners were careful to apply the history and tradition of the region to their project. French explained that they were prudent with codes and guidelines. The principal code he refers to is Act 250, one of the nation's most innovative, regulatory land use ordinances under which, to obtain a permit, developers have to meet 10 criteria directed at making Vermont cleaner and free from urban sprawl. "We color within the lines when it comes to rules," he said. The hotel, which opened in December, is managed by Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants - yes, the same group that manages Vero Beach Hotel & Spa. It's a small world after all.

When I left the site with sawdust sifting from the soles of my Nike Air Max 95s into the cracks of Levi Orvis's marble sidewalk, I turned to look at the stunning backdrop behind the new hotel - a reforested Mount Equinox where moss and maidenhair fern cover the crumbling remnants of old farm walls. From the 1907 Orchid Park Hotel to the 2016 Taconic with its porches and rocking chairs, I was happily reminded of the old French proverb that "the more things change, the more they stay the same." ❁