

# Where to stay

EDITED BY  
PETER BROWNE

Reviews of the month in USA Cotswolds Jersey New Forest



## GLORY DAYS

Glenmere is in a class of its own. It's the grandest, dandiest hotel in upstate New York. By **Reggie Nadelson**

PHOTOGRAPHS: BALL & ALBANESE

**I**N THE LOWER HUDSON VALLEY, an hour's drive from New York City, a terracotta mansion with pale-blue shutters appears on the crest of a hill. Surrounded by terraced Italian gardens, Glenmere looks over green lawns and stands of ancient trees towards a private lake. Only the sound of men clipping the exquisitely kept hedges disturbs the countryside quiet. On the terrace, a woman drowns in a deep

wicker chair, iced tea beside her. I think I can hear her sigh with pleasure.

When I heard there was a 1911 Tuscan mansion 50 miles from the city, I thought it would be a little more, well, kitsch: a Tuscan McMansion, perhaps, or Vegas Tuscany. It is not. Robert Goelet, scion of those vast pre-income-tax Gilded Age fortunes, hired architects Carrère and Hastings, the great Beaux Arts firm of the day, to build him a Renaissance-revival villa. They had

built the New York Public Library, and went at Glenmere with the same brio.

Goelet lived at Glenmere until the 1940s, and from then on it was variously a hotel and a party venue. By the time the current owners got hold of it, it was a mess.

Dan DeSimone and Alan Stenberg entirely reimagined Glenmere as an 18-room hotel, without spoiling its character, its great marble staircases or the sunken Italian gardens. This is going to sound ➤

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► like hyperbole, and I wish I could find something at least a little sceptical to say, but the whole damn place is simply one of the most beautiful hotels I've ever seen.

Should I start with the rooms? Decorated not in period – which would have been Gilded Age overkill – instead, they are in a cool, serenely timeless idiom. Mine is the Duchess Suite, named after the Duchess of Roxburghe, Goelet's sister (this was an age when the British aristocracy married American money), and it has three French windows overlooking the lawn. The walls are palest grey with white moulding. There is a huge bed with a creamy headboard, a fireplace and deep armchairs. There is a marble bathroom, with a great shower and a clawfoot tub. The owners have remembered everything: the docking station for your iPod; the big writing desk; good reading lights; the fact that the fewer the decorative items the better, because their taste might not be yours.

The public rooms are built around an outdoor cortile, where you can eat or drink under the stars. A wood-panelled library with a fireplace is packed with

books you would want to read on a winter's day, everything from picture-books of old mansions to a biography of Marlon Brando. There is plenty of art on the walls: an old portrait in the library; an abstract expressionist piece by Helen Frankenthaler... But this is no museum. Instead, it's a sort of dream house.

## A hammock, slung between trees on the lawn, beckons, as does the outdoor fireplace

The living room is all pale silks and velvets, with more French windows that open onto a wide terrace. A gleaming black grand piano looks as if Fred Astaire might wander in and play 'Cheek to Cheek'. The only false note is that this is the *Marie Celeste* of pianos, operated by a built-in computer that plays the music and makes the keys move.

The dining room next door is glorious, with its églomisé glass panels and 18th-century chandelier. Breakfast and dinner are served here. But if you want something

less than three or four courses with great wine, you can head to the Frog's End Tavern for homemade pizzas and pasta.

For those who feel compelled to do something sporty, there's a heated saltwater swimming pool and two tennis courts. And the spa, just along a terracotta arcade from the hotel, is in a class of its own.

But a hammock, slung between trees down on the lawn, beckons, as does the outdoor fireplace, and I manage to raise doing nothing to an art form. Almost nothing. In fact, I re-read *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton's great novel of the Gilded Age. With the sun in my eyes, it seems that Pussy (Wharton's nickname) might, even now, be coming down the sweeping staircases to cast her sharp, satiric eye over the assembled.

And for those who require more activity, the surrounding Lower Hudson Valley makes for excellent sightseeing – West Point, Franklin D Roosevelt's home at Hyde Park, and Storm King Outdoor Sculpture Park. Also close by is Woodbury Commons, the vast fashion discount mall – of which Pussy would most definitely have disapproved. ⑦

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## AMERICANA HIGH SOCIETY AT PLAY

In 1818, Thomas Jefferson visited The Homestead hotel in Virginia, where he took the waters for his rheumatism and enjoyed the cooking. From the beginning, the Republic's rich looked for places to escape to. But the real boom came with the Gilded Age of the 1880s and the railways.

Robber barons, industrialists, the idle rich, the Rockefellers, Carnegies and Vanderbilts built immense faux-European palaces near the shore in **Newport, Rhode Island**. They went upstate to **Saratoga, New York** for the racing season, and then on to the **Adirondack** wilderness where they practised

*la vierustique* in 100-room houses staffed with cooks, barbers and billiards teachers.

Old Money, or those who pretended to it, went to **Maine** in the summer: FDR and Brooke Astor to **Bar Harbor**; the elder Bushes to **Kennebunkport**. **Southampton on Long Island** was another bastion of privilege, as

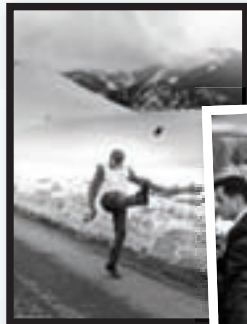
was **Nantucket** off the Cape Cod coast. Its neighbour, **Martha's Vineyard**, has since become famous for its mix of politicians and artists – Bill Clinton, James Taylor and Meg Ryan.

Still, northern winters are cold, and at the turn of the 20th century the railways reached Florida, and the rich went South. Carrère

and Hastings, who built Glenmere, also designed **Whitehall**, the first great Beaux Arts building in **Palm Beach**, which became the warm-weather camp for the Kennedys. The west-coast rich favoured **Santa Barbara** in the Santa Ynez Mountains, where the Reagans once had a ranch.

The wealthy set the style for sports, too. Averell Harriman, who was chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, put in a link to **Sun Valley, Idaho**, the first US home for Alpine skiing. Ernest Hemingway, Gary Cooper, Tom Hanks and Bill Gates followed. It was made famous by *Sun Valley Serenade*, a 1941 movie featuring Glenn Miller. Curiously, in a bit of capitalist globalisation, the film was a hit in the USSR. 'In the Mood' became, they say, the top tune of the KGB house band. REGGIENADELSON

From left, Hemingway in Idaho; Clark Gable, Van Heflin, Gary Cooper and James Stewart in Beverly Hills; JFK in Massachusetts



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