

THE ENTERTAINING SPECIAL ISSUE

SOUTHERN

Lady

BONUS SECTION
LUNCHEONS
PARTIES
& MORE!

in the
kitchen with
**Martina
McBride**

Our favorite
Coconut Cake
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RECIPES & IDEAS





GRAND *Getaways*

Salamander Resort & Spa

ONE OF THE NATION'S MOST ACCOMPLISHED BUSINESSWOMEN ESTABLISHES A PASTORAL PARADISE IN THE HEART OF VIRGINIA'S HORSE COUNTRY.

BY Annalise DeVries
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Stephen DeVries

Owner Sheila Johnson has left her personal touch throughout the Salamander. The resort's common areas feature her art collection, and in the guest rooms and spa, visitors may admire the photographs she has taken on her many travels. Some of the images have even been printed on scarves for guests to purchase.



As the road winds through Middleburg, Virginia, to the Salamander Resort & Spa, the trees give way to grassy fields that have long attracted equestrians, wine connoisseurs, and avid golfers to the area. The resort, however, offers something new. Here, plush sofas, cozy fireplaces, and a carefully curated art collection send the message of modern luxury. It can be hard to imagine that a few years ago the property was a quaint farm. Yet when Sheila Johnson first set eyes on the site, she conceived of an alternative use for the space. “I immediately saw the opportunity to build something different for the Washington, D.C., area,” she says.

Though only 20 miles away, the Salamander feels worlds apart from the busy capitol. As the cofounder of Black Entertainment Television and co-owner of three professional sports franchises, Sheila is well acquainted with urban jetsetters and their need for a quiet retreat. “From the beginning, health and wellness have been important parts of the Salamander story,” she says.

As plans developed, Sheila’s vision expanded to include a larger resort with fine dining, an equestrian center, and access to the neighboring golf course and vineyards. The spa features state-of-the-art amenities, as well as a range of specialty treatments, including grape-rich products developed in the south of France. The fitness center offers classes such as happy-hour yoga and a complementary

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUSTIN KRIEL



The resort’s 340 acres in the heart of Virginia’s horse country take their name from war hero and former governor of Rhode Island Bruce Sundlun, whose wartime code name was “Salamander” since he possessed its characteristic resilience. It became the property’s namesake until Sundlun sold the farm and retired to New England. But knowing that the salamander historically symbolized strength and bravery inspired Sheila to ask to have the name revived when she purchased the property.



fitness walk through the property. For Sheila, the spa remains her favorite attraction at the Salamander. “I always make time for it regardless of how busy I get,” she says.

Although her plans started with the spa, Sheila first came to Middleburg for the horses. Her daughter Paige is an accomplished equestrian and competed in the town. With riding’s importance to her own family and to the life of the surrounding community, Sheila carved out a special space for horses here. The equestrian center offers traditional and nontraditional training that emphasizes partnership between horse and rider for experienced and novice riders alike. Equestrian director Sheryl Jordan explains, “We teach a deeper level than just the mechanics of riding and give our guests the opportunity to learn to relate to horses more personally.”

While Sheila leaves the riding to her daughter, by establishing a multifaceted experience at the Salamander, she has found a complement to her previous work in the entertainment industry. In both businesses, she reflects, “it’s about taking care of people.” The natural transition to hospitality shows in the careful attention to detail that pervades this majestic retreat.



At the Salamander, diners may choose from a rich selection of locally sourced flavors. Culinary director Todd Gray of Washington’s Equinox offers mouthwatering choices at the equestrian-inspired Harriman’s Grill and the Gold Cup Wine Bar. At the Market Salamander, guests can purchase gourmet picnic baskets. For those seeking a culinary adventure, guest chefs teach private classes at the resort’s cooking studio.

