

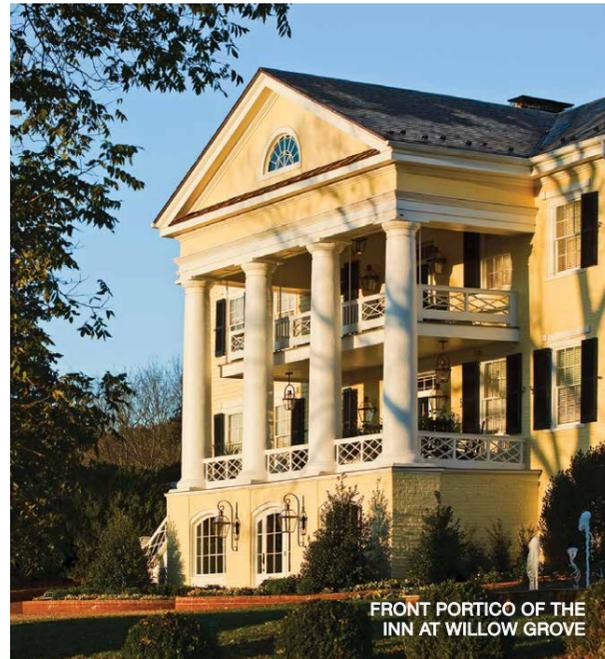
Virginia Wine Country

BY CHRISTINA NIFONG

TO TURN OFF ROUTE 81 and enter Virginia Wine Country is to leave behind the four-lane commuter traffic of DC for a rolling ribbon of country roadways flanked by emerald pastures, hand-hewn stone walls, and signs displaying the name of each proud estate: High Clover Farm. Poplar Grange. Innisfree.



VINTAGE RESTAURANT AND PUB



FRONT PORTICO OF THE INN AT WILLOW GROVE

THE INN AT WILLOW GROVE

Three stories high, with the very sweeping views of the Blue Ridge Mountains that Thomas Jefferson would have enjoyed, the nearly 250-year-old Inn at Willow Grove is spectacular. Owners Charlene and David Scibal poured millions into an extensive renovation, and the result is a pitch-perfect mix of historic brick and chic, well-considered furnishings, uneven dark wood flooring, and art reminiscent of Magritte.

Guests can stay in the manor house or opt for any one of a collection of cottages on the forty-acre estate connected by pebble paths, bubbling fountains, formal gardens, and tucked-away trellises. Dinner at the celebrated Vintage Restaurant and Pub is on the ground floor, a space with the feel of a cozy wine cellar from which a wall of French doors lets in fading

sunlight and lends a view of the mansion's imposing front portico.

For my meal, Chef Scott Meyers has whipped up five courses, beginning with a charcuterie of duck and pork, both sourced locally and cured in-house.

When the server says "local" here, it's not just talk. The morels in the open-face ravioli were foraged from the inn's property. The watercress and chickweed and chive flowers have been picked from a patch of meadow a mere walk away. And this year, the restaurant planted its first culinary garden, although it hardly needed it: ninety percent of what is plated is procured locally.

The next morning, a slight knock on the door brings a silver tray of dark caffeinated delight and tiny pockets of warm, powdery dough. Beignets for breakfast. In bed. Mornings don't get any sweeter than this.



CULINARY GARDEN DINING AT THE SALAMANDER RESORT AND SPA

SALAMANDER RESORT AND SPA

I arrive during an unseasonably cold rain, but it's not long before I find myself fireside in the Salamander Resort and Spa's larger-than-life living room, any residual travel weariness quickly melting away. Opened in summer 2013, this equine-themed resort was fashioned from 340 acres of grassy fields into 168 guest rooms, a spa, and an equestrian center so picture-perfect it doubles as an event space. Building from scratch allowed planners the chance to craft every detail, creating high-ceilinged suites and a 5,000-square-foot ballroom worthy of Prince Charming.

Weekly wine tastings from local wineries and in-depth culinary classes take place in a designated kitchen studio—just two among a long list of resort activities that includes zip-lining, trail riding, antiqu-

two seasonal tasting menus (one is vegetarian) are offered in the Salamander's signature restaurant, Harrimans, named for the DC socialite Pamela Harriman who once owned the property.

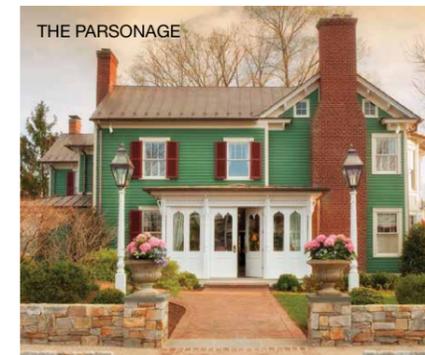
Meals at Harrimans wow with delicacies such as silky gazpacho, a raw oyster shining from its center, and caviar over gnocchi, served atop a box of smoldering hay. Other stars on this seasonally adjusted menu: a hearty and spicy Maryland crab "soup" with the crab served standing in its shell and topped with a malt vinegar froth, evocative of the sea, paired with a South African dessert wine with so storied a lineage it was purportedly enjoyed by imbibers of old such as Alexander the Great and Charles Dickens. Indeed, it's easy to see why the fine grape endured: it tastes like sunset in a glass.

THE INN AT LITTLE WASHINGTON

To say that The Inn at Little Washington's reputation precedes it would be an understatement. Its repertoire goes something like this: twenty-seven years ago, AAA awarded the restaurant here its coveted five-diamond accolade, then two years later, the inn became a five-diamond resort as well, and in the decades since, chef and owner Patrick O'Connell has garnered every award within his grasp.

But knowing all these details still did not prepare me for what I would find as I stepped inside the main building, a stately structure that was once nothing more than a corner gas station. Ornate wallpaper, showy chandeliers, furniture of velvet and brocade, and statues of monkeys, elephants, and dark-faced swamis, combine to create a Tony Award-winning set of a parlor. Whimsy and spectacle are stirred together again and again throughout the inn's twenty-four rooms. Over and over, I turn a corner and can't help but smile.

Breakfast brings yet more magic: a flight of four juic-



THE PARSONAGE

es; crispy, lightly sweetened granola; a quail egg atop corned beef hash served in a cast iron skillet the size of a silver dollar. And then there's the oatmeal soufflé: the bottom a layer of thick, warm oats and above a bal-

loon of whipped egg whites. As the server sets my tray down, she pops the balloon, stirring in syrup and rum-soaked raisins.

Between bites, I ask about the granola, which is so good it makes my head spin. The server promptly promises the recipe. I finish up, heading out into the sunshine, where my same server is standing at my car holding the door. Inside, pretty as you please in my passenger seat, rests a white-and-gold tin brimming with granola.

YOU LOVE: activities galore, equestrian everything, and an accessible full-service spa.

YOU NEED: an all-inclusive resort, a place perfect for a large group, a weekend for two, and even four-legged friends.

YOU STAY: at the Salamander Resort and Spa in Middleburg, VA.

YOU LOVE: small-town living, fairy tale surroundings, and the royal treatment.

YOU NEED: award-winning cuisine, a sprinkle of whimsy and adventure, and pampering to the hilt.

YOU STAY: at The Inn at Little Washington in Washington, VA.

PHOTOS OPPOSITE PAGE ABOVE LEFT, COURTESY OF THE INN AT WILLOW GROVE; SALAMANDER RESORT BY JUSTIN KRIEL; THE INN AT LITTLE WASHINGTON BY GORDON BEALE