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The Inn at Montchanin

VILLAGE AND SPA

The Inn at
Montchanin
Village and S



A 19th-century village transformed into a luxury inn makes the perfect home base for exploring the mansions, gardens and museums of the Brandywine Valley.

By Theresa Gawlas Medoff

Situated at a crossroads in the midst of bucolic countryside, the small village of Montchanin, Delaware, was a bustling place at the end of the 19th century. Along with a cluster of modest homes inhabited by workers of the nearby du Pont Black Powder Mills, the village boasted a blacksmith shop, a schoolhouse, numerous workshops and, by 1889, a post office and a permanent train station along railroad tracks that linked Wilmington, Delaware, with central Pennsylvania.

The train still passes through occasionally these days, but the schoolhouse closed long ago, and the railroad station now houses a florist shop. The village itself—still owned by a descendant of the du Pont family—was transformed 20 years ago into a luxury country inn called The Inn at Montchanin Village and Spa, with the former blacksmith shop now the site of the inn's acclaimed Krazy Kat's restaurant. Still quaint, quiet and surrounded by trees, the complex comprises a peaceful corner of northern Delaware, where pretty little houses of pink, cream and pale yellow stand amid rustic gardens and terraces linked by brick walkways. Old stone outhouses still remain behind the homes that line the tongue-in-cheek-named Privy Lane.

Eight historic workers' homes were converted over a painstaking, five-year period into the inn's 28 elegant guest rooms, which range from the standard House Room to a multi-level, 2-bedroom Superior Suite. Many of the rooms have their own porch for guests to relax on, and several have private gardens. Each of the rooms, which are named for du Pont family friends such as Thomas Jefferson, differs in

layout and décor, but all have been designed, says co-owner Missy Lickle, to make guests feel as if they were walking into her own nearby home—casual but elegant.

Honored as a Small Luxury Hotel of the World, listed on the Sele Registry of Distinguished Inns of North America, a member of Hist Hotels of America, and numbered among Condé Nast Johansen's Luxury Hotels, the Inn at Montchanin is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. All those accolades mean one thing: yo stay at the Inn at Montchanin will be unforgettable.

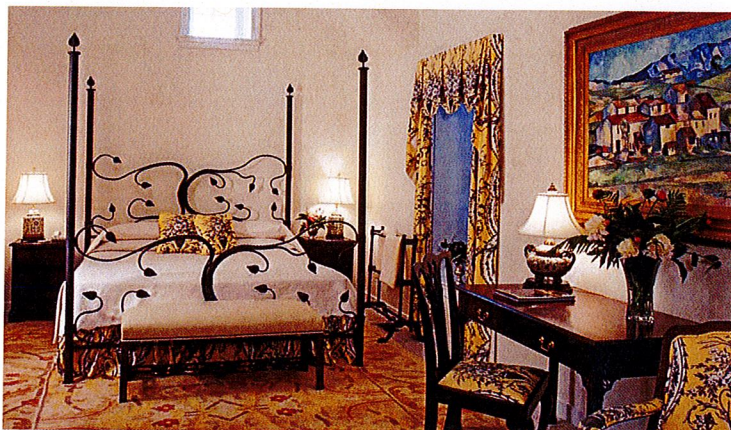
Check in at the front desk, situated at the front of a converted barn, and be sure to use your AAA card to receive a 10 percent discount. While your bags are brought to your room, pop into the spa next door to make an appointment for an anti-aging facial, a hot stone or Swedish massage, or one of the spa's signature treatments. Especially comforting in colder months is the Hammam Body Ritu, a 90-minute, whole-body therapeutic massage treatment that uses ingredients such as mint tea, coffee, quince, orange blossoms, jasmine, amber and clove to warm, smooth and soothe.

Appointment made, settle into the Gathering Room, the centerpiece of the former barn, where an oversized stone fireplace is aglow with a crackling wood fire. The portrait given prominence above the fireplace is of Mrs. Lickle's grandmother, Margaretta Lamot du Pont Carpenter. Help yourself to some snacks and a cocktail from the honor bar—just jot down your name and the dri



One of the homes-turned-inn at Montchanin Village

PHOTO BY THERESA G. MEDOFF



Algernon guest room



Carpenter board room



Dinner at Krazy Kat's

BOTTOM 3 PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE INN AT MONTCHANIN VILLAGE AND SPA

will be charged to your room—and sink into a comfortable chair in one of the large room's cozy sitting areas furnished with antiques, artwork and whimsical touches, like the clothed met monkeys standing watch on the hearth.

Spread out the brochures you've picked up, and plan your next few days. The Inn at Montchanin is located in the heart of the Brandywine Valley—in fact, the Brandywine River flows by just a short distance away. The spectacular scenery of the Brandywine Valley has inspired three generations of Wyeth family artists, so make sure a visit to the Brandywine River Museum in nearby Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, is on your itinerary. A short drive from that museum takes you to world-famous Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. No matter what the season, visitors to Longwood's 1,077 acres will be enchanted by the formal and naturalistic gardens, woodlands, meadows, ornamental fountains and 4.5-acre conservatory. The annual Chrysanthemum Festival runs through November 20, after which Longwood will be bedecked for the holidays both indoors and out from November 24 to January 8, 2017. It's a magical evening excursion.

The Brandywine Valley has earned the nickname Chateau Country because of the numerous mansions—many of them du Pont family homes—sprinkled throughout the region. Three of those homes in Delaware, all still fully furnished with exquisite antiques, are museums open to the public: Hagley, the original du Pont estate in America; the 175-room Winterthur mansion and its adjacent galleries, the premiere museum of American decorative arts; and the early 20th-century Nemours mansion, built in the style of a Louis XVI chateau complete with formal French gardens. All three homes are decorated for the holiday and host special events and tours.

There's time aplenty for touring tomorrow and in the following days. But now, it's time to walk a short distance across the inn's property for dinner at Krazy Kat's. The softly lit main dining room of the restaurant was once the blacksmith's shop, and if you look closely you can see the hooks where horses were tethered for shoeing in days gone by. Humorous artworks depicting cats and dogs in ornate human clothing adorn the walls. Krazy Kat's, so the story goes, was named for the eccentric woman whose furniture and décor store occupied this building after the blacksmith shop closed. Lickle's grandmother used to say that the woman was "one crazy cat."

Select from among the delectable dishes on the menu prepared by executive chef Joe Johnson—entrees like pan-seared duck breast with roasted sweet potatoes, fennel-crusted venison with white chocolate corn polenta and, for purists, grilled fillet mignon.

Finish with dessert and coffee and then retire to your comfy room, perhaps to soak in a bath before relaxing with a book by the fire—all of the superior rooms have gas fireplaces. Tomorrow, you'll awaken and dine in a sunny breakfast room at Krazy Kat's, and then you'll set out from this special inn to discover the other treasures of the Brandywine Valley.