

Condé Nast Traveller

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Lazy days of summer

BRIGHT YOUNG THING
HOW TO RENT NANCY MITFORD'S HOUSE

QUIET GREECE

EMPTY BEACHES & HOT WHITE LIGHT

**NEW YORK
ESCAPE**

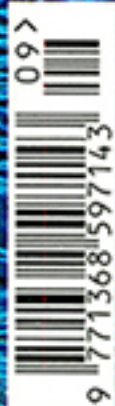
THE CLEVER ALTERNATIVE
TO THE HAMPTONS

THE MOST CURIOUS
NEW HOTEL IN
THE MALDIVES

EATING, SHOPPING, EXPLORING

COPENHAGEN,
PALM SPRINGS, PERU
& SOUTH AFRICA

THE SMART SIDE OF
THE FRENCH RIVIERA



CLEAN SWEEP

Green and rolling Litchfield Hills is an apple-pie corner of Connecticut that happily wears two hats. Antiquers are already wise to its old-school ways but now it's the fresh and crisp foodie scene that's got clued-in New Yorkers sniffing around – and settling down. Local Gisela Williams brushes up on the best spots. Photographs by Alice Gao





From top: bottles at Jeffrey Tillou Antiques, Litchfield; the pool at the Inn at Kent Falls; the exterior of Privet House. Opposite, a room at Jeffrey Tillou Antiques



AT THE TURN OF THE 20th century my great-grandmother and her financier husband hired Henry Janeway Hardenbergh, the architect of Manhattan's Plaza Hotel and The Dakota building, to design a house for them in Litchfield Hills, Connecticut. Dozens of Italian craftsmen were shipped in to construct the sprawling, Tudor-style mansion, named Kilravock after a castle in Scotland. When it was completed in 1905 they, like several other New York families, began to commute between their country homes and Manhattan.

Although the days of building houses such as Kilravock are long gone (it burnt to the ground before I turned 10), there are still plenty of historic estates to go around and old-moneyed New Yorkers still commute. Litchfield Hills is often described as a discreet alternative to the Hamptons, catering for a more, let's say, cerebral crowd. You won't find any of the brash new-builds currently rising over the potato fields of Bridgehampton. Here it's all about conservation, with 18th- and 19th-century houses fastidiously restored by long-time residents such as Diane von Furstenberg, Jasper Johns and Meryl Streep. Even Candace Bushnell, the *Sex and the City* author, dumped the Hamptons in favour of a home in Roxbury, one of many charming towns in the area.

As a precocious teenager growing up just outside Litchfield town, I couldn't wait to run off and explore the world. But now that I live in Berlin, one of the edgiest, most creative capitals in Europe, I often can't wait to get back here. Every summer my three children and I spend a month with my parents, who live near the Kilravock site in an old saltbox house overlooking a lovely little brook. Hummingbirds dart across the terrace; rabbits hop across the lawn. We pick our own peaches at small family farms, go hiking in protected nature reserves, and pretend to be American Indians in a vintage, hand-carved canoe while exploring the tributaries of the White Memorial Foundation.

Every time I go back to Litchfield, I run into someone I know. And after almost two decades of travelling around the world, living in half a dozen cities, it is comforting to be part of such a rooted, old-fashioned place. A contemporary of mine, Jeffrey Tillou, is now considered one of the top dealers in American antiques and folk art. He has transformed a townhouse in Litchfield into a three-storey gallery packed with pewter sconces and 18th-century paintings. 'There's no traffic here like in the Hamptons,' he says. 'And there is culture. The towns are strict about preserving the integrity of their historic districts.'

For better or for worse, many locals like to keep one foot in the past. But what saves Litchfield Hills from becoming too stodgy or provincial is a regular supply of fresh faces from Manhattan. In the past decade or so a number of New York chefs have opened small restaurants here. Chris Eddy, for example, trained under Daniel Boulud and Alain Ducasse before he launched his restaurant at the Winvian hotel; award-winning chef Joel Viehland started up the wildly popular Community Table restaurant a few years back.

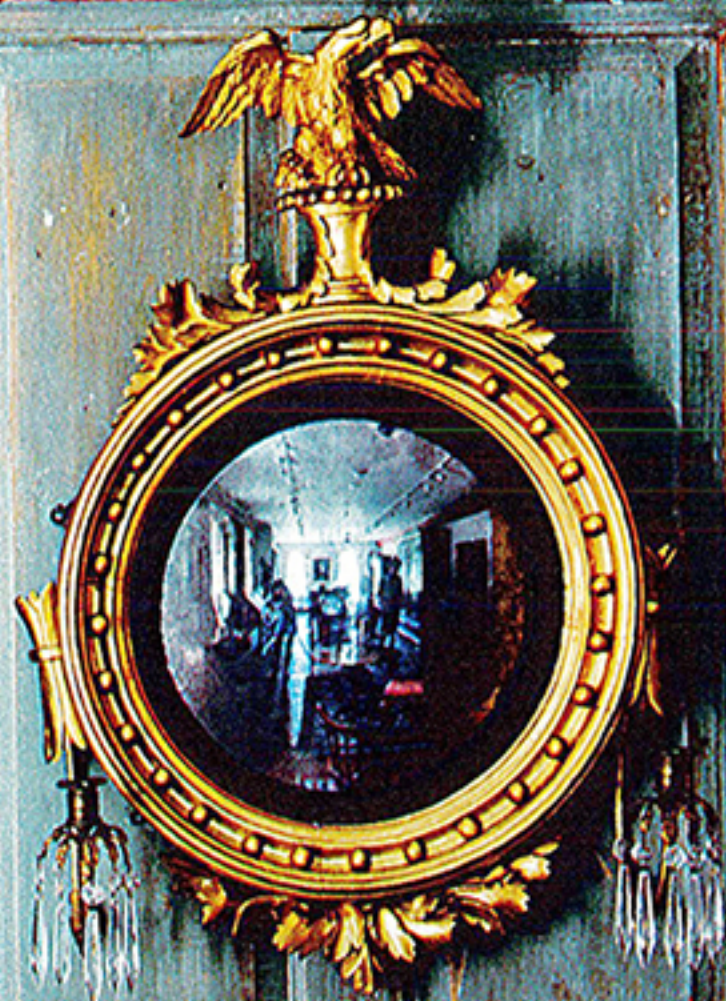
The talented new guard has been vocal in their support of the area's family-owned farms. Perhaps the best example has been the reinvention of an old property in Litchfield called Arethusa, renovated in the late 1990s by George Malkemus and Anthony Yurgaitis of Manolo Blahnik. With everything painted pure white with a black trim, it is now a showcase for their award-winning cows. It might just be the country's most stylish dairy farm. (A sign in the barn reads: 'Every cow in this barn is a lady, please treat her as such'.)

The success of the Arethusa milk brand inspired the owners to open a trio of foodie destinations in the nearby village of Bantam: first the Arethusa Farm Dairy ice-cream shop, followed by Al Tavolo with its Mediterranean menu and, most recently, Arethusa A Mano coffee shop. 'Having cows milked twice a day is not like having a yacht in the South of France,' says Malkemus, 'but conserving this farm and being a part of the community has become our passion.' Yurgaitis adds: 'We just flew in last night from the shoe factories in Milan. Coming home to Litchfield is like a breath of fresh air.'

WHERE TO SHOP

OLIPHANT DESIGN, LITCHFIELD
Head here for the right kind of preppy New England accessories: big colourful cocktail rings; statement necklaces in bright resin beads; enormous chandelier earrings with semi-precious stones. You'll also find beautiful design books and whimsical napkins and cushions. 29 West Street (+1 860 567 8199; oliphantdesign.com)

J SEITZ, NEW PRESTON
In the mid 1990s this was one of the few fashion-forward shops in the Litchfield Hills. The owners – Joanna and Bill Seitz and their daughter Amanda – have shifted their focus to furniture and homeware and, as well as still stocking some chic pieces from James Perse, Eileen Fisher and Vince, they now run an interior-design service. 9 East Shore Road (+1 860 868 0119; jseitz.com)



PRIVET HOUSE, NEW PRESTON
Richard Lambertson and Suzanne Cassano are prime examples of New York weekenders who figured out a way to move to the Litchfield Hills for good. Friends who both worked in the fashion industry, they've sourced everything for this place: perfect candles from Paris by Cire Trudon; wooden brushes from Germany; vintage books on the royal family from London. They recently opened another space next door, Privet Lives, where every few months they invite a guest designer to set up a pop-up boutique. This autumn it's Norma Kamali. 13 East Shore Road (+1 860 868 1800; privethouse.com)

MICHAEL TRAPP, CORNWALL
A lovely house and garden filled with the most extraordinary finds by the interior-designer owner. Anyone with a passion for antiques should plan a lengthy visit. 7 River Road (+1 860 672 6098; michaeltrapp.com)

HICKORY STICK BOOKSTORE, WASHINGTON DEPOT
This wonderful independent bookshop is in a charming red-brick building with two open,

light-filled rooms. Bestsellers and notable new titles take up the front part of the store, and employees have their own shelves where they can put their favourite reads. There's almost an entire wall of books by local authors such as Candace Bushnell, Frank Delaney and Francine du Plessix Gray and writers often appear for signings. 2 Greenhill Road (+1 860 868 0525)

JEFFREY TILLOU ANTIQUES, LITCHFIELD

This gallery is an incredible treasure trove. Beautiful old weather vanes, carved painted eagles, old barbershop poles, ancestral portraits and one-off items are displayed over three floors. 39 West Street (+1 860 567 9693; tillouantiques.com)

GUY WOLFF, BANTAM

Since Martha Stewart gave Oprah some of Wolff's hand-thrown clay pots for Christmas, the bandana-wearing potter has not been able to make them fast enough. He has also worked with the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. 1249 Bantam Road (+1 860 567 5577; guywolff.com)

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

COMMUNITY TABLE, WASHINGTON
Between the villages of Litchfield and Kent, this intimate dining room is filled with about a dozen handcrafted Scandinavian-style tables made out of a black walnut tree from the property. It has become a meeting place for smart New Yorkers who have homes in the area. Its success is due largely to the Nordic-American bistro dishes introduced by its original chef, Joel Viehland. His former sous chef, Dane Marcell Davidsen, has taken over and it's as popular as ever. Try the four-course Community Table Experience, a well-priced fixed menu. 223 Litchfield Turnpike (+1 860 868 9354; communitytablect.com).
About £90 for two

ARETHUSA AL TAVOLO, BANTAM
This restaurant in the former village general store dishes up ambitious modern American

food such as Maine lobster and avocado salad, grilled rack of pork with creamed-corn succotash, and Connecticut red shrimp served with grits, collard greens and Tasso ham. This spring its owners also opened a coffee shop and breakfast joint across the street, Arethusa A Mano. Both are quite brilliant. 828 Bantam Road (+1 860 567 0043; arethusaaltavolo.com).
About £75 for two

HIDDEN VALLEY EATERY, WASHINGTON DEPOT

The interiors might be dark and resemble the inside of a huge yurt – the low ceiling is covered with billowing fabric – but this casual, family-owned café is a great spot for brunch. The menu, which features local, often organic ingredients, includes a delicious breakfast sandwich served on a homemade crumpet, ➤

