

Images Courtesy of Ferrington Village

W E E K E N D I N T H E P I E D M O N T

by Hope Scamehorn Philbrick Images courtesy of Ferrington Village

I've endured my share of discomforts in the name of travel journalism: I've chased geckos out of my suitcase, burned my leg on fire coral and been awakened at four in the morning by people singing gospel songs in a neighboring hotel room. But when I slipped between the sheets at The Ferrington House Country Inn, I was consumed by one thought: This is the life I deserve. After enjoying a delicious multicourse meal, here was a bed dressed in fine linens that I could sink into, allowing me to truly enjoy the best sleep ever. Ahhh.

As it turns out, many guests at the inn adore the beds there—so much so that the beds are available for purchase at Dovecote: A Home & Garden Shop, one of the many boutiques in Ferrington Village.

But there's no need to wait for bedtime to start relaxing at Ferrington Village; you'll start feeling better as soon as you enter this quaint little town. The 1,200-acre rural community, located eight miles south of Chapel Hill, N.C., was founded in 1974 when R.B. Fitch and his late wife Jenny purchased a 200-year-old dairy farm from Jesse Ferrington. "They had always admired the landscape," says Phoebe Lockley-Fox, director of public relations for Ferrington Village. "R.B. was from Chapel Hill, and his late wife was from nearby; they'd always loved the area."

The Fitches were avid travelers who loved the English countryside, says Lockley-Fox, and they designed their new community accordingly. Gardens and open space are situated alongside places to dine, shop, ride bicycles, wander trails, swim, play tennis or golf, take cooking classes or merely sit in rocking chairs to gaze at the fields dotted with Ferrington's mascots: prize-winning black-and-white belted cows.

At Ferrington House Restaurant, the food is "European with Southern influences," says Graham Fox, executive chef. "My main goal is seasonal. I don't understand chefs who prefer imported products over local ones; they just don't give as much flavor as seasonal, local ingredients." Originally from the UK, Fox has worked in some of the finest restaurants in England, Wales and France, and he did a stint at the famed French Laundry in Napa Valley, Calif. Several casual dining options are also available in the village, including The Market Café and Deli in the old granary and The Belted Goat, which hosts wine tastings every Wednesday evening.

From the beginning, the goal for The Ferrington House Country Inn was to qualify as a member of Relais & Châteaux, "a



group of 456 of the finest restaurants and small hotels in the world," says Lockley-Fox. All Relais & Châteaux properties share a commitment to the R&C "five Cs: calm, charm, character, cuisine and courtesy." The inn is also the only AAA Five-Diamond/Mobil Five-Star property in the Carolinas. Luxury here means superior service and attention to detail, such as heated towel racks, freshly cut flowers in each room, and a turndown service that includes strategic bedside placement of robes and slippers.

Looking beyond Ferrington, there are more than a dozen overnight accommodation options in the area. Consider the Bed & Breakfast at Laurel Ridge, set on 26 acres overlooking the Rocky River. The grounds—recognized by the National Wildlife Federation as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat—include a hardwood forest, a country meadow and expansive perennial gardens. Or, as proprietor/chef Dave Simmons says, "There are ten trillion flowers around here."

The timber-frame house was built in 1983, with pine floors and large exposed beams. I stayed in the Carolina Cottage, which is separated from the main house. "Some



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—Graham Fox, executive chef of Ferrington House Restaurant

people prefer this; there's not a feeling that you're in someone's house," Simmons says when escorting me to the cottage. The space includes a hot tub and a private screened porch. The three other guest rooms inside the main house boast unique advantages such as a private balcony, skylights and garden views.

Simmons is a self-taught chef who cooked professionally for more than 30 years in some big kitchens. "It physically wears you out to work at a big establishment," he



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says, so he opted for a B&B. “I shortened my commute: I don’t drive to work, I stroll to work.” After preparing “a nice breakfast,” he says he may take a nap in the afternoon if the mood strikes. Sounds like a good way to make a living.

Comfortable as your accommodations may be, it would be a shame to sleep your whole central North Carolina vacation away. Make time to visit Pittsboro, noted for its historic and eclectic downtown.

Pittsboro, the county seat of Chatham County, is located in the heart of North Carolina, between the Triangle and the Piedmont Triad. The town was established in 1787, and its downtown is listed on the National Historic Register, along with those of nearby Siler City and Goldston; among the three towns are 53 historic sites. Pittsboro’s current population is around 2,500.

The Chatham County Courthouse, built in 1881, makes a good place to start a leisurely walking tour of downtown Pittsboro. Noteworthy sites include Pittsboro Presbyterian Church (ca. 1850), which boasts a church bell imported from London; the Manly Law Office (ca. 1842), once occupied by a state governor; and St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church (ca. 1832), with two stained-glass windows designed by a Pittsboro native.

You can explore more than history in Pittsboro. The streets are lined with a diverse array of antique shops, art galleries, boutiques and restaurants. It can be tricky for any business to survive, let alone thrive, in a small town; but many storekeepers here have discovered unique niches for themselves. For

example, the J. Henry Hardware store stays afloat despite stiff competition from nearby Lowe’s, because its owner knows there’s a market for shoppers with unusual needs: those who need to purchase nails in small quantities or who want a hard-to-find tool. French Connections sells an unexpected mix of French antiques, African art and imported fabrics, but once you learn that the married couple who own the shop lived in France, South Africa and Senegal before moving to North Carolina, the combination makes sense. (Besides which, the shop’s goods are gorgeous.) Blue Sky Equestrian specializes in Eastern riding gear. Fusions Glass Gallery & Supply Store is one of many shops featuring the work of local artists who use glass, paper, fiber, wood and other media in their creations.

Entering S&T’s Soda Shoppe feels like a step backward in time—or at least onto a movie set. Popular with residents and visitors, S&T’s is billed as an “1800s-1940s” style soda shop and restaurant. The interior features a long wood-and-marble counter with barstools, and the menu offers sandwiches and a variety of sweet treats, including “orangeade and limeade to die for,” says Neha Shah, director of travel and tourism for the Pittsboro-Siler City Convention & Visitors Bureau. Shah was right about the orangeade and limeade, but I preferred the chocolate malt. Given more time, I’d have liked to try the whole menu.

“I see a fantastic future for this little downtown,” says Jacques Dufour, owner of French Connections. Now that I’ve visited, I’d have to agree. During its 220 years, Pittsboro hasn’t grown big; it’s grown deep.

Hope Philbrick is an assistant editor for WINE REPORT magazine.



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