

Enjoy Old World pampering in Plymouth's Mirbeau Inn



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RELAXING SETTING: The Mirbeau Inn

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Sick of the daily grind? Then hop in your car and head to a French chateau. That's what I did.

Well, almost. On a whim, I drove two exits south of my downtown Plymouth home, turned left, took another quick left and checked into the Mirbeau Inn & Spa, a new hotel in the Pine Hills section of Plymouth that echoes the French countryside while embracing southeastern Massachusetts.

Turning past the piles of snow, I warmed immediately at the sight of the building. Suggesting a French chateau, it embodies "Old World elegance" with its turrets, soft colors and unique, country cottage design.

Inside, fireplaces are seemingly everywhere, flickering warm light and surrounded by cozy armchairs and couches. The colors are warm and gentle, other than a gleaming green foot bridge visible from most back windows: I'm told it stretches over a garden area reminiscent of Monet's garden. But this day, snow rules, so I focus on the inside.

I check into my large, airy, bright room (with its own fireplace) and then head down to the spa, where I plan to take a workout class and then soak in the relaxation room before heading to dinner.

The spa's fitness schedule is varied. From sports yoga classes to Urban Fusion dance workouts, to a "tone it

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up class" and, of course, spin, the spa offers classes for the body and the mind. I add a run on a top-notch treadmill in the new equipment room, and then head to the relaxation room.

I'm a spa snob. I like a relaxation room and area that is comfortable yet elegant, quiet but alive. It should have a unique feel and sooth you with sounds, sights and smells as you walk in.

This spa got it just right. The relaxation room is centered with a beautiful and soothing giant stone, encircled by quietly bubbling hot water for warm foot baths. Along the perimeter are lounge chairs, with just enough lighting to let you read. A large fireplace crackles. Outside of it is a hot plunge pool, open all winter.

And they serve cocktails. I relax in this setting and before I know it, a few hours have floated by. I change and head to dinner.

It's Monday, so Henri-Marie, the French restaurant everyone has been raving about, is closed. Instead I dine at Bistro & Wine Bar, and I'm blown away. Executive chef Steven Coe has clearly made this his food playground, and everyone who shows up has as much fun as he does. I choose the tasting menu, and enjoy Plymouth Grilled Oyster (with pancetta, bee pollen, tomato and chive fondue), a warm beet salad, Tuna Crudo, a short rib with foie gras atop it and a few other amazing treats. The highlight, though, is a plate Coe calls Duck, Duck, Goose, an amazing combination of duck and goose, touched with cherry accents and absolutely delicious.

I'd started my dinner with a French 75, a classic cocktail (the bar takes its cue from the cocktails of the 1920s and '30s). When I cannot decide what wine to have with my tastings, I ask my waitress to choose one for me. It's perfect, a nice, deep red that complements the rest of my meal.

The setting is exquisite, and again a fire crackles. Hard to imagine this won't be a top dining pick in the region; reservations are already suggested for weekend nights.

Turning in, I feel nourished in every way.

"Good morning. They call me the Tamafier."

That's my spin instructor, Tammy, introducing herself to our class. It's a small group this early in the day. One woman tells me she and a friend, who lives just a few minutes away, had decided — like me — to escape the world. "It's working!" she said.

Tammy worked us hard (which made me feel better about my dinner the night before) on state-of-the-art spin bikes. An hour in, I'm ready to rest. But I don't. Instead I join a yoga class.

Then, it's back to the relaxation room, where I'll read (OK, space out) until Jennifer, my massage therapist, comes to bring me to the treatment room.

Enjoying the fireplace in the treatment room, I settle onto the heated massage bed and let Jennifer take me through the "Monet signature treatment," a combination of massage and aromatherapy. I'm completely won over. Jennifer's expert treatment sends me back to the relaxation room on a spa-induced high. "But come back," she tells me. "I could work a full hour on your feet. They were screaming!" (She's right. And I will.)

The next few hours I bounce between the eucalyptus steam room, the outdoor hot plunge (which is especially great on this 10 degree day) and reclining. I order lunch from the spa menu and eat a healthy, wonderful light meal.

Then, it's time to go. But I'm OK with that. Because unlike a trip to the French countryside, I know I can come back easily. It's just two exits and two left turns to the world of Mirbeau, where anyone, anytime can escape.

I cannot wait to find out what it feels like in spring. And summer. But for now, check it out in winter.

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