

Virginia's Beloved Inn At Little Washington Gets Bigger

This story appears in the June 30, 2014 issue of ForbesLife.

The Utterly Charming Inn At Little Washington



This story has been expanded since its original publication.

Polymath chef-hotelier-designer Patrick O'Connell has just expanded his beloved [Inn at Little Washington](#), turning an 1850s Victorian house into six beguiling new bedrooms (from \$575). Across the street from the main inn and restaurant that's been drawing gourmards to Virginia since the 1970s, the new Parsonage offers a more modern take on the inn's theatrical English country house aesthetic—with touches of French country and George Washington Americana—as well as a quieter, more private environment.

As he did in the main inn, O'Connell enlisted the services of London theater designer Joyce Conwy Evans. That original rambling building is a 19th-century farmhouse-turned-gas-station that O'Connell started turning into the inn in the late '70s. After a Washington, DC, restaurant critic wrote a review that was so emphatically positive, the chef had to hire extra help to answer the phones and build new wings to add more rooms. Each of the 18 suites in that building and a handful of separate cottages is named for an important American chef (I stayed in the Alice Waters Suite, which has a lovely rooftop terrace with 360-degree views of the village and the Shenandoahs, as a guest of the inn) and has individual, whimsical style. They're filled with toile, chintz, puddled drapes and other elements many people would find tricky to live with—but a whole lot of fun to visit.

In the new Parsonage, the aesthetic is slightly toned down, but no less comfortable. The rooms are sumptuous and spacious, and the shared parlor and porch are divine, peaceful retreats. They have fireplaces, bay windows, plush beds and lavish bathrooms, and views onto meadows and sheep pastures.

Staff can serve meals in the common areas or in guest rooms, both here and in the original inn, but most guests still leave the cocoon. The draw—and the reason half of Washington, including Michelle Obama, keeps the place on speed dial—is the food. Among O'Connell's many talents, cooking stands out; he's a [Relais & Châteaux](#) Grand Chef (one of the highest honors in the food world), as well as the association's current president, but still manages to be in the kitchen himself most nights. His famed ten-course "Gastronaut's Menu" (\$228 per person, for the standard menu or the Vegetarian Odyssey) begin with popcorn blanketed by freshly grated truffles and grow more luxuriant from there—think savory panna cotta with a "caviar surprise" and truffle-stuffed breast of pheasant.

That, combined with supremely comfortable rooms and an attentive staff (some 110 people for 24 rooms), is what gives the place its committed regulars (who make the hour-long drive from DC every month or so) and its new converts. As I toured the grounds with the general manager, a guest walked over to tell him, "That was the best 24 hours of my life. I thought I'd been all over the world, but you showed me something new." I couldn't help but agree.