

MODERN LUXURY

# MEN'S BOOK

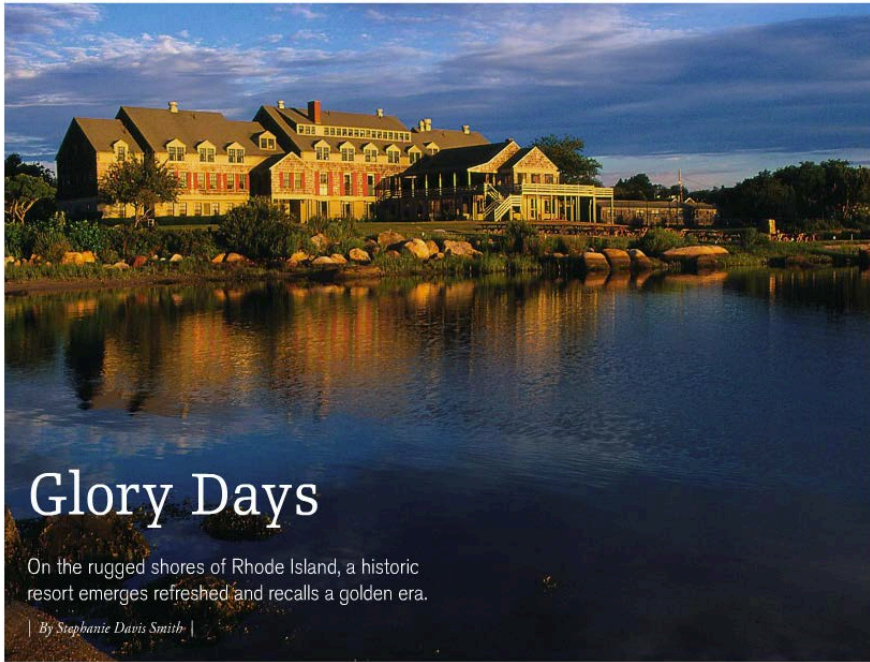
CHICAGO

## SPEED THRILLS

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## Glory Days

On the rugged shores of Rhode Island, a historic resort emerges refreshed and recalls a golden era.

By Stephanie Davis Smith |

If you're from Chicago, chances are you love your idyllic sandy-beach vacations—escapes filled with mossy palms and dark Sea Island shores, or brighter backdrops of vibrantly colored cabanas set against white sands of the Florida Panhandle. While these images recall most of my sabbaticals since childhood, I recently discovered an equally bucolic, but altogether opposite scene in Rhode Island, where rocky shorelines mingle with gray-shingled sea towns.

Perhaps Rhode Islanders prefer visitors don't catch wind of why their pleasure-filled province is dubbed the Ocean State—a nickname that caught me unawares until the driver of a shiny-black Mercedes shuttling me from the Providence Airport

to the Weekapaug Inn let it slip en route. Soon I find myself in the quaint namesake town of Weekapaug—a place so closely situated to Long Island that a stone's throw southward might hit Montauk or The Hamptons. Never before privy to the beauties of a Rhode Island respite, it's here I discover a quiet rival to the cobblestoned streets of Nantucket and the storied vacation hamlets of Bar Harbor, Maine, Cape Cod, Mass., and Bellport, N.Y.

A private community chockablock with unassuming tony types—wealth managers from New York and Connecticut, blue-chip New Englanders and city-weary tycoons fleeing the fast life—Weekapaug welcomes them all to relax in rounded-roof mansions **CONTINUED...**



**THE GREAT OUTDOORS**  
From top: The restored Weekapaug Inn on Quonochontaug Pond; each room has a unique design.





...CONTINUED to ride bikes and to tote wire baskets filled with freshly dug clams.

Sitting majestically on Quonochontaug Pond—a small saltwater sound separated from the Atlantic by a lush coastal forest and towering barrier dunes—since 1939, the Weekapaug Inn is a point of pride for everyone here. For townies, it is every bit a shining beacon as are the lighthouses dotting the shoreline. The community enthusiastically supports its new owners and the property's recent \$20 million renovation.

Like something out of a Henry David Thoreau tome, the once aging, now fully restored Cape Cod-style resort has reclaimed its former glory. Gone are outdated additions from the '80s and '90s, replaced by its 1939 footprint—one the owners duplicated by

using old photos to revitalize the historic details of entrances, red-cedar shingles, paint colors, windows and other embellishments. Modernized to the hilt, the inn now boasts a once-absent heating and air-conditioning system that relegated it operational for just a short peak season each year.

The newly revamped resort also offers 27 uniquely decorated larger guest rooms (down from 67). Though feather-top beds dressed in Frette linens and holdover furnishings culled from the original structure tempt me to describe these spaces as cozy, the collection is also sleek—high-end amenities like heated marble bathroom floors; Red Flower bath products; and gorgeous, claw-footed soaking tubs are among the indulgences. But it is the small service touches—like an impossibly warm blanket placed on your bed



**SEA CHANGE**  
From top: The terrace views at Ocean House; the revamped Sea Room lounge at Weekapaug Inn; boating on Quonochontaug Pond



**BEACH MUSIC**  
 Clockwise from top:  
 Ocean House in  
 nearby Watch Hill;  
 Jennifer Backman's  
 signature tortellini;  
 the Tower Suite at the  
 apex of Ocean House



to a spot in front of the wood-burning fire to wait while the chef whips up a fabulous dessert (a local apple, cranberry and clothbound cheddar cobbler, perhaps?). No wonder Backman was whisked away from the resort's luxe AAA Five Diamond, Relais & Châteaux sister property, Ocean House, in nearby Watch Hill, where, coincidentally, guests of Weekapaug Inn enjoy access to a five-star spa, beaches and six dining options—all a mere five minutes away.

If the thought of venturing out entices, hop on a bike or walk to the nearby private beach; its use is only for guests and town residents (aka moguls and captains of industry) in possession of exclusive passes. But before heading for the sand, make an appointment to meet resident naturalist Mark Bullinger. Having spent his entire life taking out hobie cats in the area's salt marshes, he knows the shoreline better than anyone, and will see that the resort packs you a picnic lunch prior to planned explorations to see abundant nature nearby.

Or stick around the resort for stargazing and sunset clambakes, croquet lessons on the lawn, chess games on the porch or cards in one of the inn's many communal parlors. This destination's DNA is engineered to get you out of your room and promote a sense of interaction with fellow guests, so while there are no in-room TVs unless requested, there is a new lap pool and Pilates/yoga studio to get your heart racing and to foster camaraderie.



when temperatures drop—that make the experience so memorable. Anchoring the corners of the building are four 2,000-square-foot signature suites. All distinctly adorned (no cookie-cutter design here!), each sanctuary enjoys its own private elevator and staircase with direct access to the outside, plus a full kitchen, living room, fireplace and stainless steel appliances. A separate but neighboring structure, meanwhile, houses a trio of individual suites with private, outdoor soaking tubs (perfect for privacy seekers and families). Got a pup to put up? In keeping with its utmost hospitality upgrades, the inn welcomes pooches 25 pounds and less with doggie beds and Frisbees. Talk about fetching!

Reviving the cuisine scene with signature plates like al dente tortellini stuffed with Shy Brothers Cloumage cheese, Meyer lemon and black truffle (guaranteed to wow even the most sophisticated palate) is the inn's rising culinary star and executive chef, Jennifer Backman. Gourmands will delight in her exquisite mix of dishes tinged with Portuguese, Native American and Italian influences. Enjoy her pan-roasted native tautog (blackfish) while sipping a world-class vintage from a long wine list. Then move

If, like me, you love your white-sand resort towns but have tired of hitting the same spots, seek a new circuit on the East Coast. Perhaps it's time for all of us Chicagoans to get into an Ocean State of mind. *March weekend rates start at \$425 for a deluxe room, weekapauginn.com* ■