WINTER’S WEALTH
Your Guide to Fun in the Snow

OLD SCHOOL, NEW SPA

New Marlborough couple transform an eyesore into a relaxation retreat

Alison Gembel was expecting two for her private morning yoga class, but Kipp was a no-show. Over dinner the night before at the Old Inn on the Green, proprietor Bradford Wagstaff had invited my husband to experience the beauty of hydraulics by trying out some of his big toys—an 11,000-poundcrawler/excavator and a 100-horsepower crawler/loader. Kipp immediately expressed his deep appreciation of hydraulics and jumped at the chance to dig up boulders with Brad. The fact that it took him less than a second to choose boulder-relocation over yoga gave Wagstaff a new idea for an activity for companions of sybarites spending a day at his spa.

So while Kipp moved boulders around the grounds, Allison, a dark-haired, bright-eyed yoga waif, was helping me move my energy and get grounded in the brand new spa’s sun-filled yoga room. This was an ideal start to a day at the Metcal Manor and Spa.

Since opening the Old Inn as a B&B in 1979, Wagstaff and his wife, Leslie Miller, have capitalized on serendipity. And the addition of Metcal Spa to their hospitality empire—which over time has included the Thayer House and Goddard Farm—in New Marlborough, Massachusetts, is no exception.

The couple had already been considering creating a spa when the opportunity to buy Hildreth Bloodgood’s stately stone manor from the Kolburne School suddenly arose in the summer of 2000.
HOT HAVEN
Bathers relish the rolling landscape while soaking discreetly in the hot tub at the brand-new Mepal Spa in New Marlborough, Massachusetts.

livingstyle
New faces transforming old places
The 1906 Manor, which had been the Marlboro Academy in a previous incarnation, boasted grand architecture as well as a set of original design plans that Wagstaff and Miller assiduously followed in their extensive, three-year renovation of the mansion into a twelve-room country inn.

But marring the property was an eyesore: a low-slung, 1970s steel structure that had served as classrooms and a gymnasium for the school. Wagstaff and Miller wondered if this was their spa. After all, with thirty weddings held each year at the related properties, they already had a built-in customer base. But it was difficult to imagine how this unsightly structure could house a haven of health and beauty.

"It was such an ugly building," explains Wagstaff, who manages to appear both laid-back and restless at the same time. "Of course I wanted to start anew. But it had all the mechanicals, and my Yankee frugality wouldn't let me tear it down."

Their trusted architect, Bob Swan, who had transformed the twin barns of Godfrey Farm into luxurious accommodations and a function hall, made the case for adaptive reuse. "Bob told me, 'I can't make it anything other than an unreactive, rectangular building. But we can landscape it to improve the view from the Manor, and we can transform it from the inside.'"

And so it is that stepping into Mepal Spa is a transporting experience. Visitors depart said New England for a dose of high-impact, contemporary design, warmed and softened by bucolic views from the spa's many windows. Bold use of color, texture, light, and natural elements define transitions between each room in the 6,000-square-foot retreat.

The most striking vantage point is from the hot tub on a deck in the "Quiet Room." Due to its clever configuration, walkers can relish the rolling landscape without fear of being observed by passersby. Or they can relax on wavy, maple chaises before being whisked into one of four peaceful, cork-floored treatment rooms.

But even without these additional amenities, Mepal Spa has attracted fans among both visitors and locals. Since quietly opening in August, "The spa has been astonishingly busy," notes Wagstaff. "We're blown away by the reception the spa has had." Addie Miller, "We've gotten great local business, and we haven't even had our official opening yet. People have heard about us and they come by to see what we're doing."

Miller and Wagstaff hope to serve the local community. Non-guests can use the facilities for a fee and take yoga classes by reservation. When it's completed, community members will be able to purchase spa memberships.

By the time I met Kipp for lunch on the sun-dappled terrace of Mepal Manor, I was glowing from my fifteen-step Hydromemory Facial at the soothing hands of Missy Kutchin, and anticipating the manicure, pedicure, and Skin Repair Body Treatment yet to come. Kipp had reluctantly relinquished hism boulder patrol for a massage at the spa, and he was glowing, too, but mostly from enjoyment of his earth-moving experience. It's clear that the restless mind of Brad Wagstaff is once again onto something big: heavy-machinery sessions for the spa-shy are now under serious consideration for programming at Mepal Spa.