

SundayTravel

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WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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MAINE

LIVING ON THE EDGE — IN LUXURY

The Cliff House is about the view and more

BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER | GLOBE STAFF



CAPE NEDDICK — The good news is that the Cliff House is a hotel reborn. It's gone through a striking metamorphosis and is now a luxury resort with an infinity pool, a 9,000-square-foot spa, and a beautiful on-site restaurant. For the past 144 years the hotel has sat on the majestic Bald Head Cliff with views that could inspire a landscape artist for days — only now the interior of the Cliff House no longer has the uninspiring look of a musty, *démodé* New England inn.

Now for the not-so-good news. This butterfly is still in the chrysalis. To be precise, the Cliff House is *almost* a hotel reborn. Last month I excitedly checked in, ready to try out all that the place has to offer.

"Can you tell me where the indoor heated pool is?" I asked, aching to dive in.

"That's still a few weeks out," the desk clerk told me.

"Where can I find the gym?" I asked, still hoping to get some exercise.

"That's also a couple of weeks from getting finished," I was told.

And if you're OK with getting a massage in your room, then

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PHOTOS BY THE CLIFF HOUSE

Maine's Cliff House brings luxury to the edge

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consider the spa open. But over the mid-September weekend I visited, there was still much to do.

However, when it's finished in spring 2017, the Cliff House will be unlike any other hotel in Maine. It's modern, incredibly well designed, and perched on one of the most scenic ocean-view outcroppings in the state. Hotel staff and management tout that this is the most luxurious inn to be found in southern coastal Maine. I haven't had the pleasure of staying in every hotel in the state (give me time), but after my brief stay I'm going to agree that it is probably one of the most beautiful and downright chic new resorts in Maine. It has been thoughtfully reimaged.

With the opening of the Cliff House, the trend of turning modest New England beach hotels into posh escapes is gaining momentum. The shift is happening as hotel owners and investors reason that travelers who are accustomed to stylish, urban boutique hotels will want the same experience in quaint seaside towns. Lark Hotels, a small but rapidly growing chain, is dominating the concept, but they're not the only ones. The latest of these to open is the Greydon House, the posh creation of Gant cofounder Elliot Gant's grandsons Alexander and Jeremy Leventhal.

The family that owned and operated the Cliff House since 1872 sold the property to an Ohio-based investment group in 2014 for an undisclosed price. The first phase of its \$40 million facelift debuted in August.

"Maine needed a new, fresh look, and that's what we tried to bring to the Cliff House. I think it went beyond just Maine," said Vermont-based Kim Deetjen, a designer who led the interior renovation. "I think that this sets a whole new bar for New England."

Deetjen said the August opening of the Cliff House and its Tiller Restaurant was an ambitious endeavor. She was still placing accessories in the bar moments before the first guests sat down. It gets even more ambitious next year with the addition of nearly 100 new rooms, bringing the count from 132 to 225. Later this fall a second restaurant, described as a modern take on a lobster shack, opens along with the aforementioned spa, gym, and indoor pool. Rates for a waterview room start at \$270.

For Deetjen, it was important to take inspiration from the coast without slapping guests in the face with trite marine references. No lobster trap coffee tables or lighthouse lamps to be found. She mostly achieved those Atlantic nods with color and accessories. The art is modern, but the recurring theme is nautical knots and rope. The guest room doors are all adorned with something that looks like a stainless steel porthole, but it's intended for décor purposes only.



PHOTOS BY THE CLIFF HOUSE

Design influences reference Maine, but Deetjen also has a fondness for the aesthetic of Northern European design.

"They've mastered design on a rocky coast," she said of Icelandic hotels.

The most important part of the Cliff House renovation isn't the muted palate or the new fireplaces. The star of this show is the view. Massive walls of windows in the lobby, restaurant, and lounge now allow for panoramic views of the crashing waves. After finishing at the check-in desk, you're immediately drawn to those views. Outside the landscape has been tiered to create multiple seating areas and patios where you can take in the Atlantic.

The longer I sat in the outdoor hot tub and enjoyed the view, the more I began to overlook the unfinished parts of the resort. Ultimately I realized the purpose of my visit to the Cliff House was not to use the fitness center or try out the indoor pool (although that would have been nice), it was to be outside taking advantage of what makes the property truly unique — the striking scenery.

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Whether you are outside enjoying the view from the patio/pool area or inside in one the renovated rooms (left) or the lounge in the lobby (below), the Cliff House brings a sense of style and comfort to its guests.

