

An Engaging Escape

Rescued and renovated, this southern Vermont oasis fosters links with local food

A slice of heaven: executive chef Jason Tostrup prepares lamb with vegetables harvested from the inn's garden.



By Melanie Menagh
Photographed by Jon Gilbert Fox

WHEN JANE SANDELMAN FIRST SAW the weary old coach inn in Perkinsville six years ago, it was boarded up. Still, "even like that, there was something about it that drew us in," she says. "We felt we were to be the next caretakers."

At the time, Sandelman was working as a marketing executive, and her husband, David, was the chief technology officer at an Internet company. But the couple made the leap and purchased the property, which had been standing in Perkinsville since 1792. "We quit our jobs, put our house (in Chatham, N.J.) on the market, and closed on Labor Day weekend," Jane recalls. "The realtor handed us the keys and a bottle of champagne and said, 'Good luck.'"

Since then, the couple has transformed the stately structure into an award-winning destination. Well-appointed rooms and fine dining allow guests to simply retreat from the world. But The Inn at Weathersfield prides itself on its direct links to Vermont farmers — and guests are urged to experience those ties for themselves.

"We just send people off with a picnic, a cooler and a map," says David, "and they can pick up the same beef or cheese or apples or eggs we serve here."

Indeed, executive chef Jason Tostrup personally takes guests on his daily rounds, and Tostrup says it was Vermont's special nurturing of

food and community that drew him to the inn in the first place.

"It was my job to bring farmhouse cuisine to the next level," says Tostrup, whose impressive resumé includes training with Daniel Boulud and Jean-Georges Vongerichten in New York and Charles Dale in Aspen. "It may be easier to come up with recipes for foie gras from France, but I buy whatever's closest to the inn. We started from day one talking with farmers. I feel so connected; more emotion and respect goes into my cooking."

A frequent stop for food-oriented guests is nearby Black Watch Farm, which has a herd of Highland cattle and a self-service farm shop. Items for sale include choice cuts from the freezer and eggs from the fridge, and payment is by the honor system. Another regular stop is Wood's Cider Mill, run by the Wood clan since 1798. The current operator, Willis Wood, blends heirloom apples into cider on an enormous 1880s press, its giant greased cogs working on 60 or so bushels at a time to produce 200 gallons of tart, full-bodied cider.

These and other local delicacies become part of the evening menu at the inn, complimented by a wine list of more than 2,000 bottles, making the inn a winner of both the Santé Culinary Arts Award for Sustainable Cuisine in 2006 and 2007, and the *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence in 2005. 🍷

The Inn at Weathersfield

- **Where:** Perkinsville, in southeast Vermont, nine miles off I-91 on Route 106.
- **When:** Open all year except April and the first two weeks of November.
- **Room rates:** Range from \$150 for the least expensive room in low season to \$290 for a suite in high season. Nine of the 12 rooms have fireplaces. Price includes bountiful breakfast.
- **Dining room:** Open for dinner Thursday through Sunday from 5:30 p.m. Public welcome, reservations recommended. Lucy's Tavern, a separate restaurant with a different menu, is open Wednesday through Sunday.
- **Phone:** (802) 263-9217
- **Website:** www.weathersfieldinn.com
- **Diversions:** The inn prides itself on introducing guests to Vermont farmers and food connections. Numerous other activities, listed on the inn's website, include hiking, biking, paddling, golf and various outdoor pursuits. Shopping, art galleries, The Weston Playhouse, covered bridges and Quechee Gorge are also nearby. Winter sports enthusiasts have quick access to ski areas at Okemo and Ascutney, and more southern Vermont resorts are nearby, such as Killington, Stratton and Magic Mountain. Unwind with a private dinner and tasting in the wine cellar or a massage in the inn's new therapy room.