

OUR TOP 100 SHOPS FOR COTTAGE STYLE

# cottageLiving®

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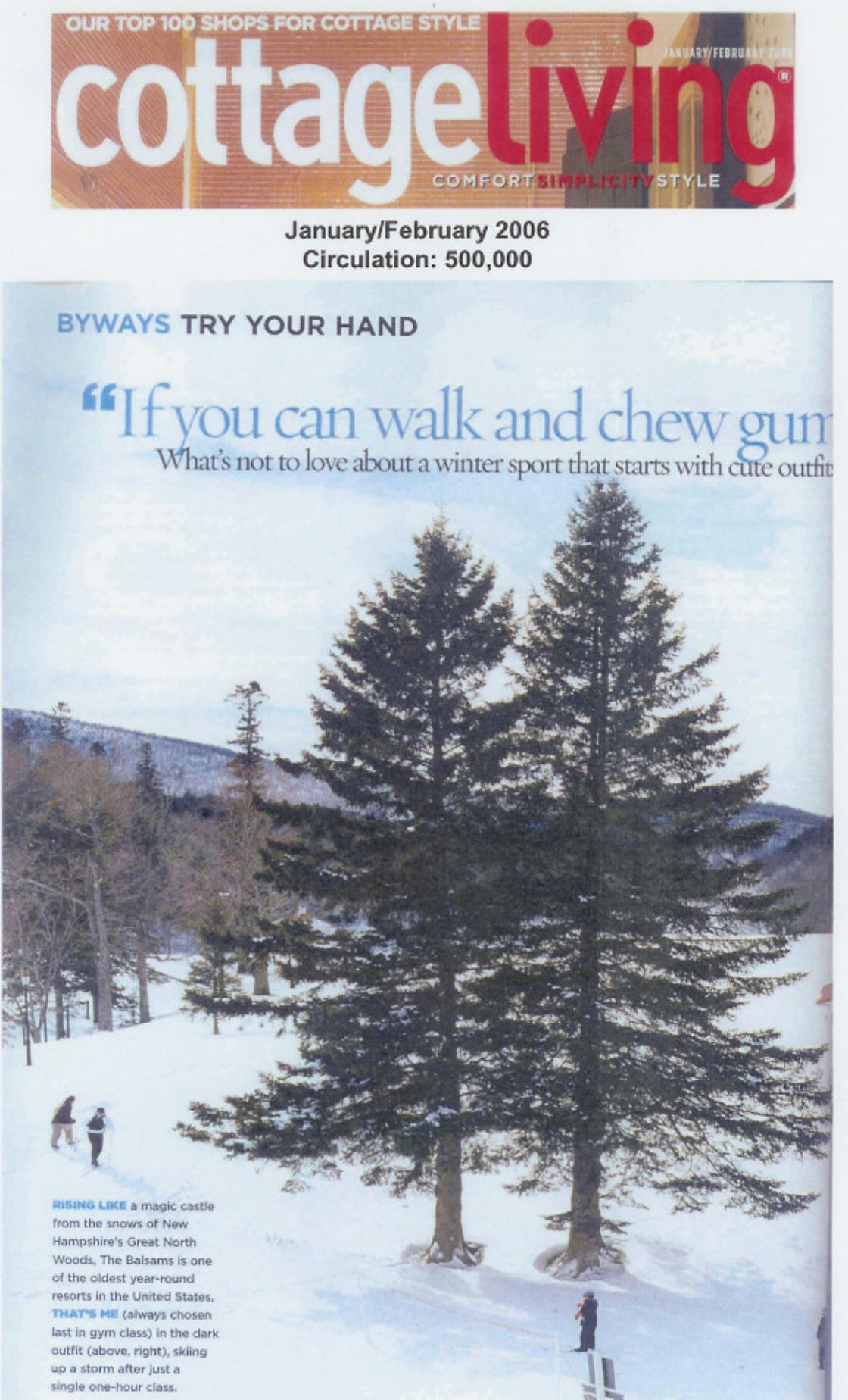
COMFORT SIMPLICITY STYLE

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## BYWAYS TRY YOUR HAND

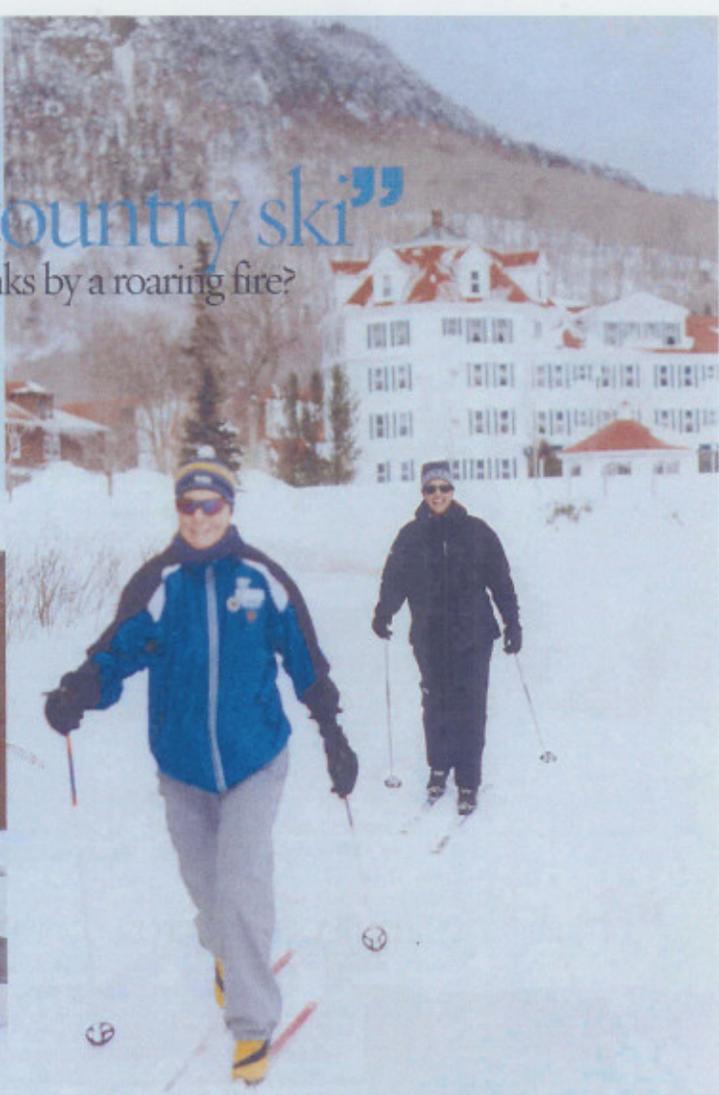
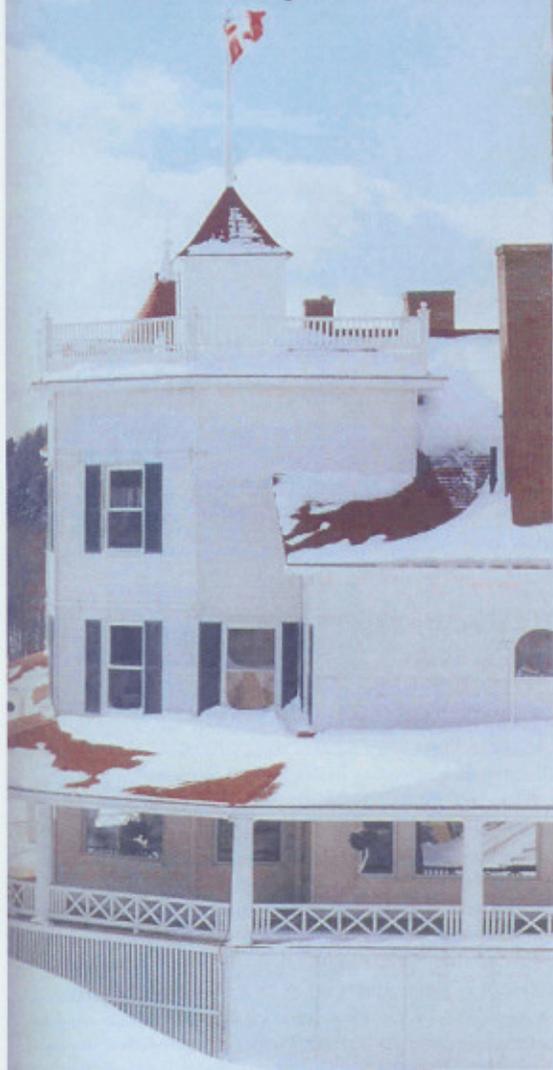
“If you can walk and chew gum  
What’s not to love about a winter sport that starts with cute outfit



**RISING LIKE** a magic castle from the snows of New Hampshire's Great North Woods, The Balsams is one of the oldest year-round resorts in the United States.

**THAT'S ME** (always chosen last in gym class) in the dark outfit (above, right), skiing up a storm after just a single one-hour class.

you can cross-country ski”  
and ends with rosy cheeks and drinks by a roaring fire?



**SNAP:** A TREE BRANCH CRACKS under the weight of wet new-fallen snow, breaking the spell cast by the deep silence of the Great North Woods. A few flakes are falling, the air is clear and cold, there are bunnies hopping in front of me and what look like bear tracks behind me. I'm sliding along on my cross-country skis rhythmically bopping to a beat no iPod can duplicate. My arms and legs are swinging like some crazy come-to-life Christmas nutcracker. I probably look like an idiot, but I don't care. I'm living the sporting life and amazed that not only do I not hate it, I'm actually having fun. Best of all, with each mile of terrain I put behind me, I can envision my thighs getting thinner.

When my editors assigned me—the garden editor—this story, I never imagined they were serious. Though I grew up in New Hampshire, I'd never been on skis; I'm not known for my love of sports attire or sports in general; and my only real physical activity is beating out the competition at weekend estate sales. In retrospect, I guess I was the perfect test subject because if I can do this, baby, so can you. >



## BYWAYS TRY YOUR HAND



“I’m sliding along on my cross-country skis rhythmically bopping



**CATCH UP** on the day's adventures by the lodge's enormous and constantly stoked fireplace.

Off I went to The Balsams, a grand ski resort in Dixville Notch, New Hampshire, thinking all I had to do was simply pose on skis for a few photos. But no, when I met my instructor, Donna Kaye Erwin, for a one-hour private lesson I knew they were serious about this skiing thing. Donna Kaye, cited in 2003 as one of the top ski instructors in the United States by *Ski* magazine, managed to break down the sport into concepts I could understand.

People have been cross-country skiing for more than 4,000 years (we know from cave drawings) and while the equipment has certainly changed, the idea remains—get from snowy point A to snowy point B. The primary differences between cross-country skiing (aka Nordic or XC Skiing) and downhill (or Alpine) skiing are twofold. First, with cross-country you're attached to the ski with only the toe of your boot, leaving your heel free. It is this free heel (as opposed to downhill's clipped-in heel) that allows you to cover flat or hilly terrain. The second difference is in simplicity: Unlike downhill, you can master cross-country skiing in two or three outings.

So what's the catch? Well, let's be honest. There were a few intimidating moments during my initial lesson. In order to stop, you must lift your foot off the snow, leaving you balancing for a moment on one ski. And there's that part of getting up from a fall—again—with what feel like canoes attached to your feet. I distinctly remember lying in the snow mumbling “quitters never win, winners never quit” as relentlessly optimistic Donna Kaye hauled me to my feet and showed me a few tricks for balancing (bend your knees and keep your eyes on the horizon). By the end of that first hour, I really did have it down and took off into the woods on one of The Balsams' perfectly groomed trails.

In the woods I finally understood what all the excitement is about. If you've always wanted to find a way to enjoy winter sports but flying downhill headfirst just isn't for you, cross-country skiing might be a calming middle ground. It allows you to leave your life behind and, because you set the pace, challenge yourself to a race you're sure to win.



## GET THERE

### DRIVING

■ **BOSTON** Take I-93 North past Franconia Notch, New Hampshire, to exit 35. Follow Route 3 to Colebrook, then east on Route 26 for 11 miles to Dixville Notch. Total trip takes about 4 hours (219 miles).

■ **NEW YORK CITY** Take I-95 to New Haven, north to I-91 to St. Johnsbury, Vermont, continuing on Route 2 to Lancaster, New Hampshire, and Route 3 to Colebrook. Head east on Route 26 for 11 miles to Dixville Notch. Total trip takes about 7 hours (390 miles).

### FLYING

#### FLY INTO MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (MHT),

then drive I-93 north past Franconia Notch, to exit 35. Follow Route 3 to Colebrook, then travel east on Route 26 for 11 miles to Dixville Notch.

Total trip takes about 3.5 hours (165 miles).

## 5 REASONS TO TRY CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

- 1 IT'S GREAT EXERCISE.** Burn calories by the hundreds and raise your heart rate through the roof. Super aerobic workout (and it's fun).
- 2 IT'S AGE-PROOF.** If you're reasonably fit with no existing medical problems, you are a candidate. Anyone—children to seniors—can do it.
- 3 IT'S A NO-BRAINER.** Yes, you will fall the first few times, but once you get the motion, you'll be a confident skier.
- 4 IT'S PRICED RIGHT.** Expect to drop about \$250 for good-quality, long-lasting equipment.
- 5 IT'S NOT DOWNHILL FROM HERE.** You can climb, descend, and trek to wherever, be it the wilderness or the nearest vacant golf course.

■ **TAKE IT DOWN A NOTCH.** Head for Franconia Notch, two hours south of Dixville Notch. Take the Kancamagus Highway through the White Mountains and enjoy the stunning scenery. When you get there look for local crafts, quality antiques, and lots of local color. And, remember, shopping in New Hampshire is tax free! For more info visit [franconianotch.org](http://franconianotch.org).

## SLEEP

### A GRAND OLD PLACE: \$\$\$

■ **THE BALSAMS**, 800/255-0600 or visit [thebalsams.com](http://thebalsams.com). Open year-round, The Balsams is deep in the Great North Woods just miles from the Canadian border. If you book the American Plan, everything's included except rental equipment and individual or group lessons. The Balsams offers cross-country and downhill skiing, snowshoeing, and ice-skating. ■



## to a beat no iPod can duplicate"



## GEAR UP

Unless you're experienced and equipped, you'll want to rent your equipment at the resort. Packages run about \$27 per day and include skis, poles, and boots. Beyond that, staying warm but not overheating is what you're after. Good news: Modern fabrics have made performance clothing thinner, so you won't look like the kid from *A Christmas Story*.

### ON THE SLOPES YOU'LL WANT:

Three layers of clothing. Start with polypropylene long underwear (not cotton, which gets wet and stays that way), pile on a wool sweater or down vest, and top off with wind pants and jacket, ski hat, and warm gloves. Before slipping on your ski boots, pull on a medium-weight liner sock followed by wool or synthetic socks.

### OFF THE SLOPES YOU'LL WANT:

- **CASUAL EVENING WEAR** (slacks and sweaters or pretty, warm dresses for her; coat and tie for him) for dinner and dancing
- **A SOFT WRAP** (so you can pop out into the cold night air for a look at more stars than you've ever seen)
- **RICH AND VERY EMOLLIENT** hand and body lotion for dry skin
- **A WILLINGNESS** to leave the office behind because cell phone reception this far north is iffy

## EXPLORE

Highlights on and off the trails

■ **LOOSEN UP** in Morning Stretch class with ski instructor Donna Kaye. Twenty minutes of gentle stretching gets you elastically ready for a day on the slopes.

■ **DINE IN STYLE.** It seems old-fashioned, but The Balsams' requirement of dressing for dinner (jacket and tie for him, casual evening for her—no jeans for anyone) begins to make sense as you enter the elaborate dining room. Have one of every dessert created by Stephen James, executive pastry chef. (You'll work it off tomorrow, believe me.)

### ■ DO IT FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES ONLY (REALLY).

Exhausted newbies and experienced skiers alike fall to pieces under the hands of Phil Freudenberg, The Balsams' resident licensed massage therapist. Will an hour on the table help on the trail tomorrow? Could it hurt?

### ■ SEIZE A CHUNKY SWEATER OPPORTUNITY.

If roaring fires, steaming hot chocolate, and checking out handsome, fit men is for you, hang out après-ski or just-because at the Alpine Base Lodge. Fifteen-foot windows give a terrific view of downhill runs; it's especially beautiful at night when twinkling lights come on.

■ **TAKE A MOMENT** while you're on the trails to stop and look around at the fresh sparkling snow. Sounds corny but breathe in the crisp air, feel the warmth in your muscles and the beating in your chest, and enjoy being alive!