



Guest rooms are spacious at the rambling Colby Hill Inn in Henniker, N.H., which dates from 1797, and dining room windows double as a bird-watching venue.

# Snowbound with a bird's-eye view of nature

By Ellen Albanese

GLOBE STAFF

HENNIKER, N.H. — “There he is!” exclaimed a guest, pointing through the floor-to-ceiling window in the library of the Colby Hill Inn. “On the bottom branch.”

With other snowbound travelers, we were watching the birds lured by at least four bird feeders in the inn's backyard when the cardinal came into view. The recent snowstorm had wreaked havoc with our plans to return home, but it created an incomparable backdrop for the fiery red plumage. The cardinal plumped up his feathers until he was almost round, either to ward off the cold or to better impress his admirers behind the glass.

There are worse things than being snowbound in a cozy old farmhouse, with a fire in the woodstove, an endless supply of homemade chocolate chip cookies, plenty of reading material, and nonstop improv by a variety of

feathered creatures, interrupted only by an occasional squirrel or a neighborhood cat.

The rambling country inn dates from 1797, according to innkeeper Mason Cobb. It began as a farmhouse, operated for many years as Bartlett's Tavern, and has been an inn since 1959. Cobb and his wife, Cyndi, bought the place in 2000.

The innkeepers live on the property in a renovated antique barn. Another barn is used for storage and as the pool house. The hulking, brown, wood-shingled structures contrast nicely with the white house, creating a quintessentially New England scene, artfully spotlighted at night.

Our room on the second floor of the main inn was spacious, with lemon yellow walls. The bed linens and drapes were a yellow, cream, and cranberry combination of florals and plaids, a decorating scheme that doesn't seem as if it should work, but it does. The queen-size bed had a high, carved oak headboard. There was a com-

fortable sitting area with two upholstered chairs and a floor lamp. In fact, there were five lamps in the room, making it easy to read just about anywhere. Floral carpets covered wide-board pine floors. Two deep windows looked onto the same pastoral scene as the library on the floor below. We liked the fact that there was more wall decor than necessary — prints, framed mirrors, a bas-relief — which made the room feel homey. We missed a thermostat in the room; we were chilly the first night and warm the second. We didn't have a fireplace, though many of the rooms do.

The shower-only bathroom was small but well appointed with thick, absorbent towels, a hair dryer, and the inn's signature silk petal soaps — colorful silk rose petals dipped in glycerin soap and dried.

The most luxurious accommodations are two suites in the carriage house, which have two-person whirlpools, rainfall showerheads, fireplaces, and decks overlooking the in-ground

pool.

The dining room manages to be both elegant and rustic, with rose marbled wallpaper, rich burgundy print carpets, crisp white tablecloths, red cloth napkins, and a striking window treatment consisting of a fabric valance topped with vines and a judicious few tiny white lights. Oil paintings in ornate gold frames decorate the walls. Through the windowed wall on one side, the old barns and white birches against a bright blue sky made a striking picture. And the tables by the window had guidebooks for bird watching.

At breakfast, we helped ourselves to the buffet of fresh fruit, juices, yogurt, cereal, and coffee cake, then chose from two hot entrees. On Saturday we both opted for a puffed apple pancake, light and sweet. On Sunday my husband enjoyed rich pecan French toast; my baked eggs were a tasty cross between an omelet and a custard, with cheese sauce. Bacon and sausage were also offered.

Dinner began with an amuse-

bouche of apple cream studded with currants on a cheese wafer; the creative combination of tastes was a sign of things to come from chef Christian Pasternak. We enjoyed citrus-encrusted scallops surrounding spaghetti squash with burnt tangerine and star anise sauce and a grilled beef filet with sweet caramelized cipollini onions and baby baked potatoes. The inn has won the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence three years running, and we happily chose the recommended wines to accompany our entrees.

Dining was definitely the highlight of the weekend for Beth and Brian DiGiovanni of Littleton, Mass. “The food was absolutely delicious,” said Beth, who also praised the inn's decor and overall ambience.

Added Brian: “Sitting at breakfast, watching the old barn, the snow, and the birds was like looking at a Robert Frost poem.”

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PHOTOS BY ELLEN ALBANESE/GLOBE STAFF

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## Colby Hill Inn

3 The Oaks

Henniker, N.H.

603-428-3281; 800-531-0330

[www.colbyhillinn.com](http://www.colbyhillinn.com)

**What we liked most:** Gourmet breakfasts and dinner with a view.

**What we liked least:** Fluctuating room temperatures, which we could not control.

**What surprised us:** Silk rose petal soaps.

**You know you're at the Colby Hill Inn when . . .** you can enjoy bird watching from the dining room with the help of a guidebook on the table .

**Rates:** Doubles \$139-\$225; suites \$239-\$269, including breakfast. Dinner entrees \$24-\$33.

**Directions:** Henniker is 83 miles, or about 1½ hours, from Boston. Take Interstate 93 north. In New Hampshire, take Interstate 89 north. Take exit 5, which is Route 202/9 west. After seven miles exit onto Route 114. At the end of the ramp, turn left. At the flashing light in the village, turn right. The inn is a half-mile on the right.