

Serenity and a spa on the Chocorua River

By **Ellen Albanese**
GLOBE STAFF

CHOCORUA, N.H. — Rarely have I felt as serene as I did sitting on the red velvet cushion of a window seat at the Riverbend Inn Bed & Breakfast in late March, watching the Chocorua River burble its way between snow-covered banks until the foamy copper ribbon disappeared around a forested bend.

Perhaps it was the massage still radiating warmth across my shoulders. Perhaps it was Sinatra on the sound system. Perhaps it was the lushly decorated parlor that combines brick-red walls, a wood-burning fireplace, and striking Asian accents such as a golden six-foot statue of Dwarapalaka, the Hindu god of entryways, and richly hued silk shawls tossed across the couches.

Innkeepers Craig Cox and Jerry Weiss have created a surprisingly seamless melding of East and West, filled with treasures they have collected traveling and enriched by their family histories. Ask just one question about the decor, and you quickly learn that every object has a story.

The sprawling inn set on 15 acres comprises two buildings, connected by a breakfast room. Windows on both sides bring the outside in, and in warm weather breakfast is served on a deck overlooking the river, which fills the air with its soft rushing sound.

We were struck by the bold use of color in our room on the second floor. Walls and ceiling were painted the same olive green, broken only by a thin strip of white molding around the top of the room. Sage green drapes framed the windows and a jacquard spread covered the king-size bed, with a decorative mahogany headboard. The L-shaped room also held a wood armoire and a single upholstered chair in green velvet, next to a floor lamp. The monochromatic effect was soothing.

End tables on each side of the bed provided good light for reading, and there was an individual book light on one, a thoughtful touch. The television was mounted on a swivel arm extending from the wall — a practical setup that felt vaguely institutional.

A print on the wall of windmills turned out to have been done by Cox's grandmother. The leaded glass flower nightlight was crafted by his father, who also made the

Tiffany-style lamps in the parlor. Descending the stairs for breakfast, we passed sepia portraits in antique frames of Weiss's mother and her brother as children.

Nearly all the rooms use the same monochromatic color scheme, in such vibrant hues as Chinese red and aubergine. When they bought the inn, said Weiss, who was formerly an interior decorator in Los Angeles, their first order of business was to strip off all the flowered wallpaper and replace it with striking paint. (Print drapes and fake floral decor were the next to go, he said.) It's a myth that dark colors make rooms look smaller, he said.

The breakfast room, on the other hand, is a sea of white: white walls, tables and chairs, linens, and ceramic dishes, accented by a red brick floor and green plants. Even Weiss glides in and out to serve wearing chef's whites and sandals.

Cox's breakfasts are creative and beautifully presented. A fruit parfait layered fresh berries and yogurt, topped with granola; it was followed by pancakes with bacon and maple syrup. A fruit garnish of green grapes, cantaloupe, and strawberries was clearly chosen for its contrast of shapes and colors as well as taste. Sunday morning brought poached pears and an egg casserole with mushrooms and leeks. Guests help themselves to coffee, juice, and local apple cider.

Most of the decorative items, Weiss said, are from Thailand, China, and India. Among the most interesting is a collection of Indian dowry boxes in all shapes and sizes. Traditionally families would put money and jewelry in these boxes when a daughter was born, then bury them until she was ready to be married, Cox said. Some are new, but others are roughened from having been underground for years.

Riverbend offers special packages that change with the seasons. We took advantage of a mud-season massage and found the shiat-su treatment in the inn's massage room yet another Eastern pleasure.

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Riverbend Inn Bed & Breakfast

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What we liked best: The seamless melding of Western architecture and Eastern decor.

What we liked least: The fact that there was only one chair in our room.

What surprised us: The lavish and beautifully presented breakfasts.

You know you're at the Riverbend Inn when . . . from nearly any spot you can see and hear the bubbling

Chocorua River.

Rates: Doubles \$100-\$235 a night including breakfast, depending on room and season.

Directions: Chocorua is 120 miles or about 2½ hours from Boston. Take Interstate 93 north to I-95 north. In New Hampshire, take exit 4 to the Spaulding Turnpike, which is also Route 16. Follow Route 16 for approximately 65 miles. In the village of Chocorua there is a blinking yellow light at the intersection with Route 113. Riverbend Inn is a half mile beyond the light on the left.



At the Riverbend Inn in Chocorua, N.H., everything has a story. The decor features monochromatic color schemes in rich hues and interesting items from Asia (and its south and southeast).

