

The Glenmere Estate, set on 150 acres in Chester, New York. Left: The new pool house echoes the Italianate style of the 1911 mansion.



THE WHITE ROSES AND alchemilla in the gardens have yet to reach maturity at Glenmere, the new country boutique hotel ensconced in an Italianate villa a 1½-hour drive north of New York City.

The spa may not be open, but already the dining room, with its hand-painted egglime silver-leaf panels, often has more than 50 people on a waiting list on Saturday nights. Helicopters ferrying visitors from Manhattan have touched down on the lawn, and the butler in morning coat is busy at the front door, greeting guests by name. Welcome to the fantasy of proprietors Alan Stenberg and Daniel DeSimone.

Converting a mansion in a rural part of the Lower Hudson Valley into a 19-room luxury hotel might seem an unlikely proposition—especially if the principals have no previous experience as hoteliers and no one's ever heard of the location. But since the property opened early this year, those in the know have been making the pilgrimage to the remote town of Chester to check out Glenmere.

Built in 1911 for real estate maven Robert Goelet on a hill overlooking Glenmere Lake, the pink Tuscan-style mansion was never intended to blend in with its 3,000 wooded acres but rather to make a grand statement. Designed by Carrère and Hastings, architects of nearby Tuxedo Park's most imposing houses and the New York Public Library, Glenmere was planned around a columned interior courtyard bordered on one side by a magnificent marble staircase. It was then embellished with balconies, terraces, porticos, medieval stone plaques, and ornamental metalwork by Samuel Yellin, not »

VILLA REVIVAL

JANE GARMY GETS A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT GLENMERE, A GILDED-AGE MANSION IN NEW YORK'S LOWER HUDSON VALLEY REINVENTED AS A HAPPENING COUNTRY-HOUSE HOTEL.



An alcove in the China Room, which can be reserved for private dinners, left. Above: The new formal garden, designed by Morgan Wheelock.

sabbatical to train at the French Culinary Institute, decided on the spot that Glenmere would make a marvelous hotel. When he was finally able to get his partner, Stenberg, a retired public relations executive, to take a look, he, too, was bewitched.

With the backing of Peter Klein, a German industrialist, and his American wife, Alison, a childhood friend of Stenberg's, work got under way. More than \$30 million later, the terra-cotta floor tiles were polished, two of the Twachtman murals restored, the staircases repointed, the ironwork repaired, the mantels and most plaster moldings saved. The house was limewashed pink and its shutters refurbished and painted—not the original dark green but a vibrant aqua that turned out to be the exact hue used at Rome's Hotel de Russie.

Other details were deliberately borrowed from hotels the partners have admired over the years, including Wheatleigh, the Italian-style country-house hotel in the Berkshires. "We've shamelessly copied everything we've ever enjoyed at other hotels we've visited," says Stenberg, who is the front man at Glenmere. DeSimone remains in the background, fussing over the wine list (first-rate) and concocting recipes with chef Michael Foss, a Californian who previously worked for Steven Spielberg and Jack Nicholson (DeSimone's own four-layered lemon-meringue cake is popular). Stenberg and DeSimone have a disarming way of making both the renovation and the running of the hotel seem simple, even though at one point there was a prolonged stop-work order from New York's Department of Environmental Conservation because there was a chance that the northernmost habitat of the northern cricket »

to mention murals by American illustrator and painter J. Alden Twachtman.

Beatrice Farrand, Edith Wharton's niece and the most prominent landscape architect of her day, was asked to design the gardens. Notwithstanding her first impression of the site—she said it would take 10 years for the place to look like anything but "a thimble on a bald head"—Farrand orchestrated a series of terraces leading to a walled garden with pools, statuary, and sculptural reliefs. She is reputed to have insisted, against Goelet's wishes, on the sinuous drive through the parkland to the house.

Over time, the estate passed through a number of hands, and the land was sold off bit by bit. There were 100 acres left in 2005 when DeSimone, a Tuxedo Park resident and orthopedic surgeon with a fascination for old houses, happened to see a "big pink mess up on a hill" while out for a drive. Intrigued, he contacted a local real estate agent and learned the place was for sale. "It was like going into Miss Havisham's house," he says about his first peek inside. A family was living in a handful of the 35 rooms, paint was peeling, and there were leaks everywhere. But DeSimone, who had just taken a



frog was being disrupted (it turned out the creature didn't live at Glenmere).

The 19 stylish bedrooms—no two are alike, thanks to interior designer Scott Snyder—have views of lawn and lake and baths swathed in Carrara marble. Some are filled with modern art from the Kleins' own collection, such as a lithograph by Robert Rauschenberg and a Robert Motherwell etching.

Downstairs, there are all sorts of places to congregate—a cozy library with flattering charcoal walls; an elegant putty-and-white living room with fireplaces at either end. Beyond the formal dining room is the China Room, an intimate space that can

dens around the house. (For now, the Beatrix Farrand walled garden remains an evocative ruin.) Unable to find all of Farrand's plans, Wheelock conjured up a formal Italian-style garden (set between the house and new swimming pool) with symmetrical beds and a long pergola. Large terracotta pots filled with agapanthus and hydrangea add height. The terrace garden on the lake side of the house is a gentler affair with beds of nepeta, roses, and boxwood intersected by gravel paths.

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TO THE MANOR REBORN
From left: The terrace garden, originally designed by Beatrix Farrand, with new plantings; the dining room's veal chop on corn-pudding cake; room No. 10, featuring a Charlie Hewitt monotype and teal cowhide X-stools.

be reserved for private entertaining, with cabinets displaying china collected by Stenberg and DeSimone over the years: guests planning a dinner can select, say, late-18th-century china with hand-painted scenes of Tuscany or 1940's Mottahedeh china bordered in blue and apple green.

Food is key to the Glenmere experience. In addition to the main dining room—whose menu features updates of classics, such as monkfish with lobster Newburg sauce and a savory crême brûlée made with caramelized onions and Gruyère—there's a tavern offering jazzed-up macaroni and cheese and a fig-and-blue-cheese pizza. In warm weather, your meals can be served in the courtyard to the sound of water gurgling from a central fountain or on the terrace overlooking the lake.

Landscape architect Morgan Wheelock has restored the grounds—expanded to 150 acres—and created an entrance courtyard and terraced gar-

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While the gardens evoke Glenmere's past, many hotel features are forward-looking. Geothermal heating and air-conditioning represent the

latest green technology. Set to open early next year is the new spa building next to the bocce courts with five treatment rooms, one reserved for couples. And of course there is the helicopter service on hand to transport guests to and from New York City or to give them a bird's-eye look at the surrounding countryside of dairy-farm pastures interspersed with small villages. Guests may instead prefer to hop in their cars for the 20-minute drive to the Storm King Art Center sculpture park, in Mountainville, or a 40-minute excursion to the contemporary-art museum Dia: Beacon.

"Put this down to a midlife crisis," says Stenberg with a grin. "We should have purchased a Maserati, but we did this instead." ♣

Glenmere Mansion, 634 Pine Hill Rd., Chester, N.Y.; 866/777-2992 or 845/469-1900; glenmeremansion.com; doubles from \$550, including breakfast.