

DISCOVERIES



TRAVEL

Restorative Practice

Blending historic preservation and creature comforts, a new hotel venture trains its enlightened gaze on buildings in need

At the heart of Old Bennington, Vermont, a handsome residence has lived many lives. Built in 1829 as a seminary, the Colonial-style edifice went on to become a country club, then faculty housing for nearby Bennington College, and later a private home, remaining in the same family's care for some six decades. It was this colorful and layered past that attracted architect Rafe Churchill to the property, which he has converted into pastoral lodgings as part of a new hospitality and

preservation venture Place in Mind, cofounded with Casey Sunderland.

Soft-launched in late May, The Seminary offers a unique travel experience—not as slick as a boutique hotel nor as dusty as a traditional bed and breakfast. “It’s supposed to

feel like you’re walking into the home of your eccentric aunt,” Churchill notes. “We want people to enter the space as one person and, inspired, leave another.” In the years to come, the address will be joined by its neighbor The Walloomsac, a former inn, built in 1771, which will comprise more than 40 guest rooms, a restaurant, a spa, and a bathhouse.

It all began as a way for Churchill, cofounder of the design studio Hendricks Churchill, to give back to Bennington, his alma mater. Purchasing the seminary structure in 2025, he imagined somewhere to



1. THE LIVING ROOM AT THE SEMINARY, THE DEBUT PROPERTY FROM THE NEW RESTORATION-FOCUSED HOSPITALITY GROUP PLACE IN MIND. 2. THE REVIVED FAÇADE OF THE 1829 BUILDING. 3. ONE GUEST ROOM'S BLUE HUE IS MODELED AFTER THE BOILER ROOM AT THE NEIGHBORING WALLOOMSAC BUILDING.

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1. ANOTHER GUEST ROOM'S RED PAINT WAS INSPIRED BY MOUNT LEBANON'S NEARBY SHAKER MUSEUM.
2. THE GREEN OF A BATHROOM IS BASED ON THE SHUTTER OF THE SEMINARY'S BARN.
3. AN ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SEMINARY (RIGHT).



host trustees, alumni, visiting parents, and prospective students—a calling card for his own transformative college experience. But his ambitions grew. Finding himself at a professional crossroads, unsure whether to retire or pivot, Churchill realized that he, a hands-on historicist with decades of experience rehabbing old houses, could rescue imperiled architecture for a wider audience. “First and foremost, the architecture is the interesting thing,” reflects Churchill. The Place in Mind team, which includes hospitality partner Terry Sanford and brand director Conor Brady, has since touched every inch of The Seminary, though you wouldn’t know it from looking. The five original bedrooms have been converted into proper suites, with cozy bathrooms carved out of the existing footprints of oversize closets. The attic became the showstopping sixth suite, crowned by the bell tower that was re-created according to archival images with the help of Bennington students. Everywhere, floorboards have been refinished, millwork repaired, and details unearthed. “How can we make this house better but not make it obvious we were here?” he muses of the approach. Says Sunderland: “Leaving no mark is just as much work as leaving a big mark.”

That philosophy has led to a symbiotic relationship between The Seminary and The Walloomsac. Sinks salvaged from one have been moved to the other; existing wallpaper patterns and paint colors have been reproduced. The Seminary’s furnishings, chosen by Churchill’s wife and creative partner, Heide Hendricks, are all vintage. Other contributors include AD100 talent Grace Fuller, who is tackling the gardens, and fashion designer Alex Casertano, who is creating uniforms and a capsule clothing line.



The overarching design strategy is as personal as it is political. “The world is saturated by Instagram and now artificial intelligence,” says Churchill. “This cursory education fosters poorly thought-out design with a disregard for history. It’s hurting the next generation of designers and hurting these buildings.” If Place in Mind proposes an antidote, it also disrupts the usual hotel business models, eschewing a heads-in-beds mandate for something deeply idiosyncratic. Going forward, the team is eyeing historic properties in other creative pockets of New England and beyond. “I am excited for the world to experience Rafe and Casey’s vision of an American brand rooted in our country’s extraordinary but often forgotten architecture,” says Sanford. It will all keep Churchill busy. As he notes: “Retiring is no longer an option for me.” aplaceinmind.com —SAM COCHRAN