

A Revamped Classic Virginia Hotel Reopens This Summer



Keswick Hall first caught Molly Hardie's eye in 1995, when she attended an event at the sprawling [Charlottesville](#) hotel thrown by the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, where her now-husband, Robert, was a student.

"Oh my gosh, we've gone someplace really far away," Molly remembers feeling during her first visit. "This is the most fabulous setting that we've ever seen. We were intrigued with the property at that moment."

Over the years, the couple strengthened its ties with Keswick Hall. They went from being guests to being members to being part of an ownership group and finally to being the sole owners in 2017. That is also when they embarked on a large-scale renovation, which includes a new wing and a restaurant from the renowned Jean-Georges Vongerichten, which will be unveiled in July. "During that time we fostered just a love of the place. It has this little *je ne sais quoi* factor about it."

Part of that is its location. The Virginia wine country hotel sits only seven miles from Charlottesville, where the Hardies have lived for more than 25 years, but it's surrounded by bucolic scenery: cattle and horse farms as well as the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Another factor is its history. Keswick Hall was built in 1912 as an Italianate home, and it remained a private estate for many years. Later it was transformed into a regional country club. Then, in the early 1990s, it was purchased by Bernard Ashley (husband of print designer Laura Ashley), who transformed the property into a boutique hotel with a residential feel — he decorated it with his own furnishings and English antiques. Each of the 48 accommodations carried its own theme, like a rowing room that had ribbons and oars and a music room with a lamp shaped like an instrument.



The Rooms

When the Hardies became full owners, they knew the luxury hotel needed an overhaul. But the couple decided it would be better to renovate and keep the historic building than raze it. They enlisted the help of Hart Howerton designers and converted the 48 rooms to 38 to create consistently sized accommodations (some of the previous spaces were too small). Now, they are constructing a new wing, which will allow them to expand the total number of rooms to 80.

Shaded in white, blues and cream, the accommodations will have light wood, elegant furniture, Duxiana mattresses and Frette sheets and bath linens. Pictures from a local photographer of nearby farms and the countryside will adorn the walls — it's part of a running theme throughout the hotel that connects guests to the region's pastoral setting.

A self-described beauty product junkie, Molly collaborated with New York City-based red flower on a custom scent for the in-room toiletries. Red flower founder Yael Alkalay visited to tour Keswick Hall's grounds and ventured over to the Hardies' farm to clip grasses, herbs and flowers from the area. The result of her olfactory outings is Dawn Meadow, a bright, floral aroma that's found in the bathroom soap, shampoo, conditioner and more.

Each room also will have state-of-the-art amenities, including smart TVs, Lutron lighting that allows guests to customize privacy settings with the touch of a button and UV light air purification systems that eliminate airborne pathogens.



The Restaurant

The Hardies lured the world-renowned Vongerichten to open his first restaurants in the South. The chef will launch spots at their other historic property, The Hermitage Hotel in [Nashville](#) (which will debut in the fall), as well as Keswick Hall.

“It’s a really big deal for Jean-Georges to come to Virginia,” Molly says about the chef, who has 39 other restaurants around the globe.

Vongerichten's farm-to-table concept will support the connecting-to-the-local-outdoors theme, since much of its bounty will come from the Hardies' nearby five-acre garden. "We're going to be producing as many vegetables as we can for the Jean-Georges menu, and also cut flowers, herbs, edible flowers, etc.," Molly says.

The Hardies decided to put the new restaurant in a freestanding structure to allow easy access for hotel guests, club members and the public. The rustic dining room will have white tiled and wooden floors, a ceramic-covered bar and a stone fireplace. There also will be tables on the terrace. In front of the restaurant, there will be a pétanque (or bocce) court adjacent to a cocktail patio, so you can sip some Virginia wine and play bocce before your meal.



The Amenities

The centerpiece of the revamped hotel will be the made-over Horizon Pool. The 80-foot, T-shaped infinity pool will have two levels and will be for adults only.

Tennis players will want to make a beeline for the new seven-court facility. Keswick Hall will boast the mid-Atlantic region's first European sub-irrigated red clay courts. Pros will be available for private lessons and group classes.

The Charlottesville hotel is most known for its 18-hole Full Cry, one of the last golf courses to be designed by Pete Dye. But since the grounds span 600 acres, there are many more activities available for guests.

"We'll have a snooker room, and we're going to shuffleboard in there as well," Molly says. "With all the swimming, tennis, biking walking, golf, two pools, I think that we really just hope the guests will come enjoy all that we had to offer, relax and when they leave feel extremely refreshed, like they've had an escape from everyday life."



A Focus on Sustainability

“Robert and I were able to mold different parts of the story to things that are really, really important to us personally,” Molly says about re-imagining the property. “And that story starts with the environmental initiatives.”

Molly is passionate about native plants, so she wanted to do the same at Keswick Hall. She recruited the landscape architects at Nelson Byrd Woltz to help. “I would say up to 90 percent of our plants are going to be native plants and native grasses,” she says.

Plus, the hotel will launch a gray water program, collecting the HVAC condensate and recycling it to irrigate the property’s foliage.

Keswick Hall also will look to minimize single-use plastics. Guests will receive a keepsake water bottle in the rooms, and filtered water stations will be installed throughout the hotel.

The Spa

The final part of the renovation will be the spa. The standalone, full-service facility will open in the first quarter of 2022 and have eight treatment rooms, a beauty lounge and a shop. It will carry red flower items and other natural products.