

BEST OF Arlington

January/February 2023 \$4.99

2023

*Reader and
Editor Picks*

in **65**

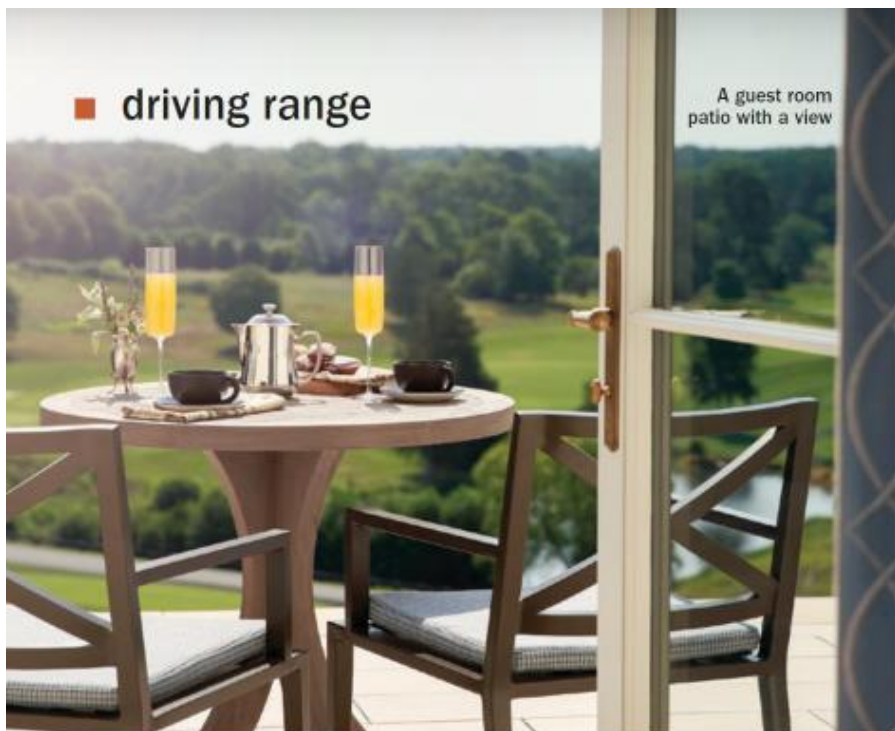
Categories

BEST
PERSONAL
TRAINER
Damion
Moss

ARLINGTON ■ FALLS CHURCH ■ MCLEAN

■ driving range

A guest room patio with a view



Treat Yourself

The pandemic left me in knots, so I finally booked that spa getaway I'd long dreamed of taking. BY ADRIENNE WICHARD-EDDS

I'VE REACHED THE age where I've seen enough fancy hotels that it takes a lot to impress me. Keswick Hall is something special.

My visit to the resort near Charlottesville was a long time coming. I first heard about it in the '90s from a friend's well-to-do parents, who'd often snag a room there when visiting their daughter at UVA, and promised myself I would check it out one day.

Years later, after I'd moved to Arlington and discovered the trove of Virginia wineries within driving distance of my new hometown, the Italianate inn always seemed like a good spot for a weekend getaway. But life intervened.

It wasn't until the pandemic that, in the throes of cabin fever, I moved the luxury resort back to the top of my bucket list after reading that it was undergoing an extensive renovation.

Tucked into a tree-lined enclave in

the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Keswick Hall has been many things since it was built in 1912—private residence, country club, boutique hotel—passing through a handful of owners, including Sir Bernard Ashley, husband of Laura Ashley (yes, *that* Laura Ashley).

When the current proprietors, Molly and Robert Hardie, took full ownership in 2017 (they also own the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville), they had a grand vision for the property. Their plan included expanding the hotel's capacity to 80 guest rooms and adding a new infinity pool and cabanas, an updated golf course and tennis facilities, a new restaurant helmed by globally acclaimed chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and a brand-new spa.

Sparkling and pet-friendly, Keswick reopened to the public in October 2021, reestablishing its reputation as not only



an excellent home base for vineyard-hopping, but a world-class destination unto itself.

My sojourn came on one of those spectacular days as summer was cresting into fall—warm enough to sit poolside in the afternoon, but cool enough for a jacket when strolling the resort's walking trails in the evening.

I dropped my bags in my room—a deluxe king with a sprawling view of the property's 600 manicured acres—then wound my way down a path to the just-opened spa, housed in a fieldstone-and-glass building with soaring windows that make the space feel at one with nature.

I had booked a 60-minute "intuitive" massage (\$205) but arrived early

COURTESY PHOTOS



The relaxation room in the spa at Keswick Hall

enough to browse the boutique, replete with small-batch, organic cosmetics, hair and skin care products (including the spa's signature line from Farm-aesthetics), as well as a smattering of country-club-chic clothing and accessories. I contemplated buying a caftan for post-spa pool lounging but dared not look at the price tag.

When it was time, I was escorted through a sunny hair and nail salon and into what seems silly to call the women's "locker room," because it felt more serene and private than my own home, with its custom furnishings and impeccably stocked towel and beverage stations. I texted my family group chat—*In the spa for the next hour. Dad is in charge*—donned a fluffy robe, stashed

my belongings in a locker and emerged into a vast relaxation room overlooking a field of wildflowers and its attendant butterflies, birds and deer.

There I sat—amid weighted blankets and sound-therapy devices, antioxidant chlorophyll-infused water and fresh fruit—while I waited for my therapist, Shanise, to retrieve me. And that is the last thing I remember.

Okay, to be accurate, I do remember Shanise ushering me into one of the spa's eight treatment rooms, which smelled divine in the way that spas do, redolent of lavender and lack of responsibility. And I remember the massage table, heated and bolstered in all the right spots, and how she went to work untangling the knots that had taken up

residence in my muscles since the last time I treated myself to a massage, well before Covid.

But all of that became a hazy recollection, melted in a puddle of bonelessness, swaddled in a cocoon of oblivion. The only thing I know for sure is that I unplugged myself for 60 glorious minutes, and when I opened my eyes, I did not want to go back to reality.

Eventually, of course, I had to, and Shanise eased the transition by handing me a glass of fresh-pressed juice. Forgoing the infrared sauna and steam room, I headed for the luxe showers, helping myself to plant-based soaps and shampoos, disposable razors, shaving gel and fluffy towels as I took another half-step back to consciousness.

■ driving range



A guest room at Keswick Hall



Marigold by Jean-Georges

Retrieving my belongings from my locker, I noted my husband's reply to my earlier text (a GIF of the parking lot attendants in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* taking the Ferrari for a joyride) and begrudgingly slipped back into my real-life clothes.

Fortunately, what I was going back to, at least for one more night, was the beautiful inn, with its tended gardens and all the trappings of a life of leisure.

My evening plans included dinner with my older son, a student at UVA, at Keswick's on-site restaurant, Marigold by Jean-Georges. Sitting on the veranda overlooking the meticulous-

ly groomed Full Cry golf course, we marveled at our luck—perfect weather, combined with a swanky story assignment that found me a mere 10 miles from his apartment. We happily shared dishes of whole roasted cauliflower, warm shrimp salad, lobster with shoestring fries, and fried chicken with house-made creamed corn.

Our server tucked a parting gift of petite madeleines into a craftily folded napkin and I sent my kid back to college with leftovers. I returned to my room to find my bed turned down and a crackling fire on the TV, convincing enough to induce a deep sleep.

The next morning, I was in no rush to extract myself from the plush bed (Duxiana mattress, Frette sheets) or leave the comforts of the vast hotel room, with its marble bathroom, stocked snack pantry and walk-in closet that made me wish I'd brought more clothes.

I set up a makeshift office on the terrace and worked for an hour or so before I realized that I was only typing a few lines at a time between long gazes at the green horizon, framed at its edges by a bronze glow. I reluctantly closed my laptop and packed up, making a mental note not to wait too long before revisiting this ethereal place.

Now, I am two people: the person I was before I experienced Keswick, and the person I am after. I pity the next hotel that tries to impress me.

Rooms at Keswick Hall start at \$375 per night. Spa treatments, including massage, facials, mani-pedis and body therapy, range from \$70-\$400 and up. Keswick Hall, 701 Club Drive, Keswick, Virginia, keswick.com ■

Adrienne Wichard-Edds returned home to discover her "Ferrari" unscathed. Find her online at theessaycoaches.com, where she helps kids find their voice and tell their stories for college.