

Destination: *Relaxation*

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE WESTGLOW



TEXT BY HEIDI BILLOTTO

PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY WESTGLOW RESORT & SPA

They say there is no place like home, but every once in a while you just have to take time to get away from it all. Spas and resorts scattered across our Tarheel State are plentiful and well-known as places offering much needed breathing space from the hectic day-to-day—inviting guests to fall into the world of rest and relaxation vis-à-vis a steaming sauna, a soothing massage or invigorating facial.

A recent call for such a respite myself, took my husband, Tom, and me to one of North Carolina's most highly rated luxury relaxation destinations—Westglow Resort & Spa.

If walls could talk, the walls at Westglow would greet guests with a warm and all knowing “welcome.” Were one to personify the Mansion at Westglow, it could be described as an old soul with a deep, kind spirit that envelopes visitors the moment they cross the threshold.

This historic home, originally built in 1917 by artist and author Elliot Daingerfield, sits atop the bald of a mountain just up from the charming town of Blowing Rock. Situated across the gorge from the Blue Ridge mountains, the Mansion and surrounds sport fabulous vistas at every turn. On a clear day, the views are spectacular. On days when the fog rolls in, you'll feel as if you are nestled away in your own private castle in the clouds.

COMING HOME

The Mansion at Westglow is the focal point on the 20-acre site and is just a short walk away from the resort's Life Enrichment Center which houses a spa, salon, pool, exercise/workout area, locker rooms and massage facilities. No need to pack up your own toiletries when you visit to work out or be worked on, as the spa is appointed with warm robes, spa slippers and a bevy of high-end hair, skin and shower lotions and potions. A small bar, dining area and service kitchen are nestled in poolside where spa and resort guests may enjoy a made-to-order lunch.

The Mansion, listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, has been beautifully and accurately restored and updated in a Greek Revival style by recent owners Bonnie and Jamie Schaefer. On display in the Mansion are a number of original Daingerfield paintings and sketches for guests to study and enjoy. The historic home offers resort guests a choice of six lavishly-appointed guest rooms and is the home of Rowland's Restaurant, a hidden gem that is in my estimation five-star dining at its finest.

Breakfast service at Rowland's is reserved for the Mansion's overnight guests, while the restaurant is open to the public during dinner hours. The talented culinary team at Rowland's also is responsible for the fabulous lunches offered at the spa which also echoes the Mansion's Greek Revival theme.

In between the spa and the mansion, guests can enjoy tennis courts and guided nature walks around the property. In incimate weather the relaxation room at the spa, set with comfy chaise lounges and cozy plush spa throws, makes for wonderful napping opportunities.

Back at the Mansion the Blue Ridge parlor which houses a unique antique 18th Century English mahogany grandfather clock and an original Steinway Model M baby grand piano (made in the same year the mansion was built) and the library, shelved with volumes from Daingerfield's original collection are simply wonderful places to catch up on recreational reading.

The parlor also offers a computer for guests, but my advice would be to leave email and voice mail messages for another time—they will still be there when you get back—instead using your visit to soak in the spirit and the history that is unique to this grand getaway.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Our first taste of the talent in Rowland's kitchen came at our four-course spa lunch, served poolside. Chef Nate Curtis greeted us and prepared our noontime repast. All lunches at Westglow are offered in a “Spa Cuisine” style which simply means less fat and calories and yet somehow still tons of flavor. We began with a creamy thick celery and potato soup with a swirl of butternut squash puree. Soup was followed by a salad of organic spinach, candied pecans, perfectly slivered sections of orange and a sprinkling of blue cheese. Our main course of three large expertly grilled, tender, tasty shrimp came atop a bed of Israeli couscous studded in herbs and scallions. The shrimp were surrounded by cubes of colorful yellow and red roasted baby



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beets. For dessert—yes, dessert—we enjoyed warm yet still crispy red wine poached apples with two pieces of crunchy puff pastry lightly spread with just the right amount of sweet apricot jam. All weighing in at just 600 calories—we left full and happy and certain we had happened upon a very good thing.

For us the afternoon was filled with naps, a couple's massage, steam room, pool, followed by more napping, until the fiery sunset over the majestic mountains was clearly visible through the floor to ceiling windows on either side of the fireplace in the relaxation room. Then we headed back to the Mansion to change for dinner.

Rowland's Restaurant is named for Bonnie Schaefer's father, philanthropist and savvy businessman, Rowland Schaefer. Schaefer was the founder of Claire's Boutiques and before that, in the early to mid-1960s, of Fashion Tress Wigs. As he and his wife traveled the world, they enjoyed the pleasures of fine wining and dining, and now the restaurant at Westglow is named in his honor and follows that same joie de vivre.

Executive chef Jason Jarrell has been at Westglow for five years and has experienced first hand the transformations that have taken place since the Schaefer's came on the scene. Previously, when a visit to Westglow had more of a spa and health focus, the restaurant had been named Elliott's (for Elliott Daingerfeild) and all of the menu offerings were based on spa cuisine.

Today at Rowland's the focus is two-fold: a spa menu of starters, salads, entrees and desserts is still available along with the nutritional information for each dish; or guests may order from what the staff at Rowland's calls their "indulgent side" of the menu.

We were expertly served and spoiled by Rowland's lovely manager Missy Watson and waitstaffer Johnny Lail.

Each table was set with a tasting of six different sea salts and a bowl of olive oil dressed with freshly

ground pepper and grated Parmesan cheese—just the thing for dipping the selections of Rowland's locally baked artisan breads.

We enjoyed very much a complimentary amuse of rich crab, avocado and lime to start; savored salads and first plates of delicious Thai-style crab cakes, tender bourbon barbecued quail served with a croustade and an expertly poached locally-raised egg; a house salad with bib lettuce, avocado and roasted vegetables; and seared foie gras set atop a slice of savory French toast with mixed greens.

We then took great pleasure in our entrees of miso marinated sea bass, so tender, light and delicate that Tom detailed it as tasting like grilled butter; a scrumptious braised Painted Hills Ranch boneless short rib and a made-in-house and to order chestnut stuffed ravioli, garnished with leaves of Brussels sprouts and pomegranate seed all drizzled with truffle oil. Finally, we snuggled in with a cheese plate and a glass of Port followed by desserts of chocolate croissant bread pudding and white chocolate Amaretto cheesecake.

We left in a dreamy haze of contentment, said goodnight and headed up to our guest room, our last glasses of wine in hand along with two small to-go gift boxes each encasing a small bite-sized biscotti dipped in chocolate—oh my!

HARD TO SAY GOODBYE

All said, the next morning after a lovely breakfast prepared for us by Chef Nate, we were sad to see our get-away end, but grateful for having been touched by the Westglow spirit. We'll head back next time we venture up the mountain, if not for the spa or a relaxing overnight, then for dinner at Rowland's for sure. For us, the only thing wrong with Westglow was that we had to leave. *

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