

By Joseph Bednar 📅 February 18, 2020

Historic Properties Take Center Stage In Lenox



Historic properties are getting a second act in Lenox these days.

Take the \$60 million expansion and renovation at the former [Cranwell Spa & Golf Resort](#). The Miraval Group, a subsidiary of Hyatt Hotels, purchased the property in 2016 for \$22 million and has transformed it into a high-end wellness resort, called Miraval Berkshires Resort & Spa, and a luxury, 102-room hotel, Wyndhurst Manor & Club.

Set to open in May, the complex known as [Miraval Berkshires](#) is the third Miraval property nationwide, following its flagship in Tucson, Ariz. — named among the top 20 destination spas in the world last year by *Condé Nast Traveler* readers — and a second location in Austin, Texas, which opened last year. Hyatt acquired Miraval in 2017, and Wyndhurst Manor & Club is part of Hyatt's Destination Hotels brand.

The 29,000-square-foot spa in Lenox “was conceived to excite all five senses and encourage mindfulness and introspection,” according to the company, and will include 28 treatment rooms, an indoor/outdoor lounge pool, separate relaxation rooms for women and men, a salon, a sauna, a steam room, a retail boutique, and a courtyard that evokes “a sense of harmony with nature.”

The neighboring Wyndhurst Manor & Club, a renovated Tudor-style mansion built in 1894, will offer a more traditional hotel experience, but guests there can purchase day packages for Miraval.

“We are excited to continue the Miraval brand’s expansion with the upcoming opening of Miraval Berkshires, as well as to welcome Wyndhurst Manor & Club to the Hyatt family,” said Susan Santiago, senior vice president of Miraval Resorts, in a release. “These two properties will offer distinct and memorable travel experiences, and we look forward to inspiring once-in-a-lifetime, transformative experiences for all guests who visit our Miraval and Wyndhurst resorts in the heart of the Berkshires.”

Then there’s the Elm Court estate on the Stockbridge-Lenox line, constructed in 1886 as a summer cottage for William Douglas Stone and Emily Vanderbilt. It completed a series of renovations in 1919 and evolved into an inn in the ‘40s and ‘50s, hosting dinners, events, and overnight accommodations. It was eventually placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

These days, [Travaasa Berkshire County](#) is working on a \$50 million renovation of the property to develop a new resort there, featuring 112 rooms, including 16 existing suites in the Gilded Age mansion. After a series of starts and stops, including a holdup in land court in Lenox and a pause for infrastructure improvements to the roadway and water and sewer lines, the project is now moving forward.

“Travaasa Berkshire County’s plan preserves and protects a beloved historic property, respects community character, conserves open space, and contributes to the hospitality culture of the region,” the project website notes. “A tasteful, responsible commercial use of this property by a financially healthy organization will revive a dormant estate, create living-wage hospitality jobs at all skill levels, and maintain the property on town tax rolls.”

Even the Mount, Edith Wharton’s English manor-style home during the early part of the 20th century, is making news these days. Her classic novel *The Age of Innocence* is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, and to mark the occasion, the Manor is displaying Wharton’s personal copy of the book.

“We have many, many of her works that either have bookplates or her signature — or both, as with this copy — and so, to finally have her own copy of *The Age Of Innocence* join this collection of her work, it’s amazing. It’s incredible,” Nynke Dorhout, the Mount’s librarian, told Northeast Public Radio recently.

Looking Ahead

Lenox is much more than its historical properties, of course. It's also long been renowned for its cultural and recreational attractions, from Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, to Shakespeare & Co., to the town's collection of rustic inns and bed and breakfasts.

But the business community has seen new energy in recent years as well, with projects like a Courtyard by Marriott that opened in 2017 and features 92 rooms with panoramic views, an indoor pool, a large patio with firepits, a restaurant, and a 12,000-square-foot event space; the relocation of Morrison's Home Improvement Specialists Inc. from Pittsfield and its adaptive reuse of a blighted building that had been vacant for 10 years; an apartment conversion at the Walker Street Residences by the Allegrone Companies; and the construction of Allegrone's headquarters and co-working office space using green design and technology in a building on Route 7.

Lenox at a glance

Year Incorporated: 1767
Population: 5,205
Area: 21.7 square miles
County: Berkshire
Residential Tax Rate: \$12.10
Commercial Tax Rate: \$14.78
Median Household Income: \$85,581
Median Family Income: \$111,413
Type of Government: Board of Selectmen, Open Town Meeting
Largest Employers: Canyon Ranch, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Kimball Farms
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To address an aging population, town officials created a first-time-homebuyers program in 2016 in partnership with four banks that offers up to \$10,000 in down payments to qualified applicants. They also changed zoning requirements to make it easier to build new apartments and condominiums or convert older housing stock into appealing residences, as well as adopting a Complete Streets policy that will make the town eligible for state funds to improve connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Meanwhile, to encourage companies to move to Lenox or expand, town officials have been focused on a five-year open-space plan that was adopted several years ago. In addition, the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, the regional land trust, has been working to develop a regional trail network with a long section passing through Lenox.

Add it all up, and this town of just over 5,000 is looking decidedly to the future, while continuing to celebrate and restore its rich past.