

Daycation

A 2026 ESCAPE TO 1768 AT
THE GRAIN HOUSE AND OLDE MILL INN

—
BY JEREMY CURL



We were just back from vacation and life was back to life. We were out and about, and upon thinking better of dessert, my son said, Dad, it's ok—it's day-cation. That's what this column is: a reminder that life is meant to be enjoyed, and every day can be a vacation if that's how you approach it.



A fantastic meal with your spouse and no kids is amazing. A fantastic meal and a boutique hotel getaway with your spouse and no kids—now that's sublime.

Sublime: That's a powerful word. Often used in reference to haute cuisine, synonyms include exalted, transcendent, sumptuous. Sumptuous (synonyms: elegant, lavish, posh) implies some level of luxury. Meaning expensive. But with entrees mostly around the \$30 range, the Grain House is not particularly splurgy.

It is, however, extremely good. We started with the panzanella salad and avocado toast, both of which were light, fresh, and delicious. The latter, served on crostini with heirloom tomato, basil, and the gooiest of burratas, is a true standout. There's an extensive appetizer menu, spanning the range from light options like these to more substantial ones like bacon-wrapped short rib minis, ribeye spring rolls, and whiskey maple glazed lollipop wings with chicken sourced from Goffle Farm, a renowned local supplier of natural, high-quality poultry.

Chef John Benjamin is a Culinary Institute of America grad with an impressive pedigree of tutelage under world-class chefs like Thomas Keller of California's famed French Laundry, and Charlie Palmer, a pioneer of the farm-to-table movement. True to those roots, Chef Benjamin produces high-quality "Progressive American" cuisine based on seasonal, locally sourced ingredients.

My wife is pescatarian, which pretty much makes me pescatarian, so we were immediately drawn to two dishes for our main course: the oven-roasted halibut in a saffron sauce, and off the rotating seasonal menu, the crab-stuffed flounder. I was more excited





about the halibut, and it did not disappoint. But the flounder was absolutely transcendent. I am often underwhelmed by crab-stuffed dishes, finding them too creamy or sodden with mayonnaise, with the meat inside lukewarm while the fish on the outside is too dry and overcooked, but this was none of these things. The fish was as moist and tender as any I'd had in a long time, and the stuffing was piping hot and pleasantly light, with just a touch of spinach to balance out the creaminess. It all went perfectly with the sauce, which was buttery and smooth but not too rich, balanced with all sorts of subtle yet enchanting flavors.

Enchanting: Another strong word. Synonyms: alluring, captivating, endearing. This is an accurate word for the feeling you get when you walk into the Grain House. The low-ceilinged front hallway immediately brings you back in time, to a place when people were generally shorter. Around the corner to the left, just off the main dining room, is a small room that seems minimally changed from that period, where you can picture men in tricornered hats and knee-high socks discussing the tyranny of King George. But the most appealing of all the spaces at the Grain House is the coppertop pub on the right.

We were there on a chilly evening in late spring, the kind of night where a warm glowing fire still feels right. But whereas the room is an oasis of warmth in the winter, in the summer it's a cool respite from the heat. It was Friday night, and the room was lively with conversation and smiles. The overall vibe was friendly and inviting, and that was carried through by Maria, our wonderful server. I must also give a shout out to Margie, the hostess I dealt with in the morning when I realized I'd left my sunglasses at the table, who was also very pleasant.

The dessert menu looked phenomenal, but we opted instead for liquid indulgences—espresso martini for the missus, and a delightful strawberry and Bailey's concoction for myself, called Strawberry Fields Forever. The Grain House has an extensive wine list as well as a good selection of craft beer and bespoke cocktails. I made a mental note to come back for happy hour sometime soon.

The next part of our adventure was the hotel stay. Getting our overnight bags out of the car reminded us we were on daycation, and we became positively giddy. The façade of the Olde Mill Inn was beautifully lit, and we stopped to take a picture. We were freewheeling and carefree—this was what daycation was all about.

The colonial lobby was charming in the manner of a country B&B, though a bit more elegant, with a grand sweeping staircase in the center. We checked in and procured some water and snacks,



as well as a bottle of prosecco, because why not? Daycation! Not quite ready for bed, we explored the hotel, admiring its décor and various nooks tucked with antique furniture. We stumbled upon a game room with a beautiful poker table, but we opted for a game of darts instead.

And then sleep, cool and comfortable and luxurious. Nice bedding and an air purifier pumping the freshest air you could imagine. Highly recommend one of the "Pure" rooms, regardless of your allergies and sensitivities—it just makes for a really nice rest. The room was quiet and well appointed, a tasteful mix of contemporary and classic, and I could've slept there for days.

Only I couldn't, because I'm an incorrigible early riser. So instead, come 7 AM, I hit the gym. Like most everything else at the Olde Mill Inn, it was tasteful and modern and comfortable, just the right size and just what you need to shake the cobwebs of the night before. Coffee was easy to procure at the breakfast buffet just down the grand staircase, along with juice, waffles, breakfast breads, cereals and the like. A nice breakfast, a nice shower, and the daycation was over.

But it was a delicious taste of 1768—one I won't soon forget.