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12
SECRETS OF
SUMMERHOUSE
STYLE
PAGE 86

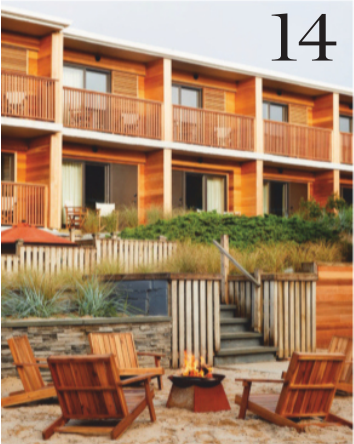
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COASTAL
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THE SUMMER ISSUE

2020



ON THE COVER

The pristine beauty of Lanikai Beach (named one of our Best Beaches, page 38) on O'ahu, Hawaii. Photograph by Gray Malin

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SUNRISE SUNRISE SUNRISE

With its magical landscapes and quirky culture, Rhode Island's coast is straight from a movie. **MEG LUKENS NOONAN** sets out to discover its secrets

Photography by **JULIEN CAPMEIL**

KINGDOM
KINGDOM
KINGDOM

Stunning views of the
Atlantic Ocean from
Newport's Castle Hill Inn



I WASN'T ALL THAT SURPRISED TO SEE WILD RABBITS STANDING AT ATTENTION WHILE REVEILLE SOUNDED ON NEWPORT'S CASTLE HILL.

I'd been walking to a lighthouse above the sea-splashed rocks of Narragansett Bay when the nearby Coast Guard station's morning call began. Just ahead, in a slash of sunlight, two cottontails rose to their hind legs, held still as sentries while the bugle played and then darted into a thicket of wild rose. Natural behavior? Could be. But in my few days of traveling Rhode Island's meandering coastline, I'd learned that, in these parts, enchantment is everywhere.

Maybe the roots of that wonderment can be traced to the tiny state's long history as a refuge for dreamers. Tucked between Massachusetts to its north and east, Connecticut to its west, and nearly cleaved from the south by the insistent wedge of island-studded Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island has attracted freethinkers since the 1630s when Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, both banished from more conservative Massachusetts Bay Colony, separately founded settlements there on near-utopian principles. Alas, that anything-goes mentality bred scoundrels too; rum runners, slave traders, and robber barons helped earn the state its nickname, *Rogue's Island*.

I've lived most of my life in New England, but knew little about this smallest tile in the regional mosaic. Sure, I've seen movie-set Newport—the Gilded Age mansions, the whippet-sleek yachts. But I missed what I suspected was the essence of the state: the kind of dreamy landscapes—tide-bent cordgrass and tiny coves, fogbound beacons and flinty bluffs—that filmmaker Wes Anderson showcased in *Moonrise Kingdom*, his quirky coming-of-age 2012 film set in a scout camp and shot mostly on islands in Narragansett Bay. I wanted to explore that cinematic shoreline. Starting with a pair of historic beachside enclaves in the state's southwestern corner, I laid a plan to make my way east to a hilltop castle at the tip of Aquidneck Island, then head to a Lilliputian hamlet on the southeasternmost border—so private it might have been overlooked except for one



storybook hotel made entirely of stone. Along the way, I'd seek out foods that insiders say exist only in Rhode Island—things I'd heard of, like legends almost, some as endearingly oddball as a Wes Anderson flick.

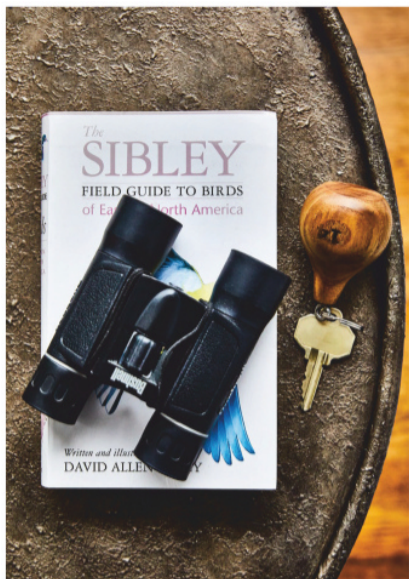
ACT ONE: WEEKAPAUG

My shore-hugging odyssey begins in Weekapaug, a seaside community that, like Watch Hill, its fancier sister down the road, is officially part of the town of Westerly, Rhode Island. Weekapaug consists of a cluster of summer homes; some are grand and gabled with wraparound porches and manicured lawns, others cottagey and bordered by freeform tangles of honeysuckle. Most are still owned by descendants of their original builders who were lured by the area's pristine barrier beach and sparkling salt pond—both as appealing now as they were when visitors first arrived in the 19th century.

The outsider's ticket to this insular haven is the Weekapaug Inn. The rambling, shingled inn was built on the pond's western shore in 1939 after a cataclysmic hurricane in 1938 destroyed the original beachfront lodge. That epic storm, so powerful it registered on a seismograph in Alaska, leveled nearly every structure on the coast and killed some 600 people. (There were miraculous stories of survival, too: Two babies were found alive on a floating door; another family rode their battered house across the tempest-tossed bay.)

Renovated in 2012, the inn has the trappings of a smart coastal hotel—understated neutrals, Audubon prints, wicker chaises in which to sip one's gimlet. But underneath beats the heart of a sleepaway camp, thanks in large part to Captain Mark Bullinger, the inn's khaki cargo shorts-wearing naturalist and de facto scoutmaster.

It's choppy out on Quonochontaug Pond, but Captain Mark is dauntless, steering the 24-foot *Quonnie Queen*, with its fluttering navy blue awning and gleaming teak deck, into the freshening breeze. The boyish 59-year-old knows these waters well. He spent childhood summers at his grandfather's place in



At Weekapaug: birding tools (top); murals in the lobby, (above); Mark Bullinger on the *Quonnie Queen*





Weekapaug, worked at the inn as a teen, and returned as often as possible after he moved to Massachusetts for work.

“Even when I lived outside of Boston, I never really left Weekapaug,” he tells me.

Mark has about an hour before he’s due back to lead a bird-watching safari. Later, he’ll set up telescopes on the inn’s lawn for stargazing. Other days he might rally the guests to launch homemade rockets or hunt for the fairy houses he built and hid in the shoreline grasses. (“Well, we don’t say I built them; we say the fairies built them.”)

“Over there is a cottage called ‘Swept Away,’” he says, pointing across the whitecaps to the far shore. “It floated across the pond during the hurricane and landed on the other side, mostly intact. The owners made a few repairs and moved back in.”

It’s too rough to motor by the oyster farms at the end of the lagoon, but Bullinger assures me I’ll get to enjoy the fruits of those operations—dubbed Quonnie Rocks—later at dinner. Salt ponds stretch like watery footprints along this shoreline for more than 20 miles; a giant could skip a flat-sided boulder from one to the next with a skilled flick of the wrist. Besides being home to many of the oyster farms that make up the state’s robust aquaculture industry, they also act as inland seas with sheltered warmer waters and bonus beaches on their shores.

“These are our stuffies,” chef Devin Bozkaya says with pride as he places a small plate in front of me back at the inn. “We make them with diced soupy.” Stuffie, I learn, is Rhode Island-speak for stuffed clams, a combination of chopped clams, breadcrumbs,



“WE LOVE IT.
WE NEVER WANT
TO LEAVE. IT’S
WHAT YOU THINK
OF WHEN
YOU IMAGINE A
CLASSIC AMERICAN
SUMMER.”

—KIEL JAMES PATRICK

The Newport
waterfront



and seasoning that is practically the state dish. “Soupy” is soppressata, a dry-cured Italian sausage infused with cayenne, paprika, and—this is key—Rhode Island salt air, first made by immigrants who moved from Calabria, Italy, to Westerly, now considered the soupy capital of the world. The Westerly Packing Company, an Italian grocery and sausage factory about 10 miles inland, supplies the Weekapaug Inn. (It’s worth a detour—especially if you get fifth-generation sausage maker Bruno Trombino to show you the soupy drying room.)

Weekapaug serenity is seductive, but I want to check out upscale Watch Hill, which in its Victorian-era heyday had seven grand hotels. Only two remain, including the canary-yellow Ocean House, lavishly and lovingly resurrected in 2010. I walk from the hotel past Taylor Swift’s blufftop mansion and down to cove-hugging Bay Street, bookended by the vintage Flying Horse Carousel, in operation since 1883, and a dockside Lily Pulitzer store. In the century-old Olympia Tea Room, I take note of the TEMPERANCE sign over the marble bar and order a beer anyway. “And stuffies, please,” I add with enough insouciance, I hope, to mask the fact that I’ve just learned what they are.

ACT TWO: NEWPORT

Heading east, I come upon the blue expanse of Narragansett Bay and make my way across the two graceful bridges that span it. I’m deposited on 15-mile-long Aquidneck Island, home to Newport—and my fairytale destination for the night, the Castle Hill Inn, perched atop a rocky peninsula. I pass the resort’s beachfront cottages and pocket-size marina, then climb a winding driveway through a tunnel of trees to the turreted castle, commissioned in 1874 by Alexander Agassiz, a prominent Harvard naturalist and marine biologist. During the ’38 hurricane, rising waters cut the promontory off from the mainland; Agassiz’s daughter-in-law was so terrified she never came back.

My room feels like an elegant castle keep, my window a duchess’s lookout to the broad bay, veiled now in a moody, drifting fog. I’m drawn down first to the warm lobby decorated with carvings and porcelain from Agassiz’s world travels and then to the cozy, timbered Mansion Bar. I want smoky and sweet, and I find them both in a sublime house daiquiri. I sleep like royalty.

The next morning, I motor regally out of the marina on a handsome Hinckley available to inn guests (for a fee) from Barton & Gray Mariners Club, a crewed yacht-sharing company. We round the broad southernmost tip of the island, where the bay meets the open Atlantic. Following the curve of the land, we cruise by striated ledges lashed by breakers, spot kite-flyers on pebble beaches, and pull into a sheltered cove to bob awhile



in the clear green-blue water and gawk at the mansions on the bluffs above us. The waterways and coves feel secret, the vistas near-magical. Almost like—yes—*something out of a movie*.

Back on land, I head to broad Easton’s Beach, popular with families, surfers, and socialites not only for its waves, but for two culinary landmarks. First, a brightly painted truck proffering Rhode Island’s summer drink of choice: Del’s frozen lemonade. Introduced in the 1940s, the sweet slush is a blend of fresh lemon juice and chunks of rind that’s based on a 19th-century Neapolitan treat. I’m coached on how to drink it right—never a straw!—but either a squeeze or a shake of the waxy cup to warm and loosen the slush, and then it’s all about the gulp. I’m an instant convert. At the far end of the beach lies another Rhode Island iconic food stop: a legendary clam shack called Flo’s. I’m in love the minute I head up the blue wooden walkway lined with red and white faux-pier posts and shaded by feathery bamboo. At a picnic table, I blow through a box of Flo’s famous clamcakes—greasy crisp on the outside, airy on the inside and flecked with chopped clams. No wonder Rhode Islanders vacation in their home state, I realize. I’d never leave either.

Leave I must, though, but not before going in search of a local prince, 37-year-old designer Kiel James Patrick. The native son built an apparel brand—and a cult-like following—with artful Instagram images of a kind of New England Neverland, all clam bakes and vintage Land Rovers and sunset cocktails. It would be the kind of consistent aesthetic vision Wes Anderson might admire—if Wes were the kind to wear signal flag crewnecks and nautical rope bracelets.

“Friends saw *Moonrise Kingdom* and said, ‘That is your life!’” Patrick tells me. “I went to that scout camp. I swam in those coves. My wife and I grew up in Rhode Island, and it is still our



Little Compton's
Stone House



Sakonnet
Harbor



Coffee,
sweets, and
more at the
Art Cafe



Rocky shoreline in
Little Compton

KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

GET HERE

Weekapaug, Newport, and Little Compton are all easily accessible by car from T.F. Green International Airport in Warwick, Rhode Island.

STAY HERE

Weekapaug Inn: 27 rooms and 4 suites, some with kitchens; all with water views. There's also an outdoor pool and a gym. Rates start at \$365; weekapauginn.com.

Castle Hill Inn: On a 40-acre peninsula with 33 accommodations in the landmark Victorian mansion or in airy, updated cottages on a private beach. Rates start at \$415; castlehillinn.com.

Stone House: 14 rooms and suites in the main house and in an adjacent renovated barn, some with ocean views. One room has a private rooftop cupola accessed by spiral staircase. Rates start at \$299; newportexperience.com/stonehouse.

SPOILS OF THE KINGDOM

Discover only-in-Rhode Island tastes and treasures along the way at these classic spots.

STUFFIES

Olympia Tea Room, open seasonally at 74 Bay Street, Watch Hill.

CLAMCAKES

Flo's Clam Shack, open seasonally in two locations on Aquidneck Island: 4 Wave Avenue, Middletown, and 324 Park Avenue, Portsmouth.

DEL'S FROZEN LEMONADE

At storefront and mobile truck locations throughout the state, including Easton's Beach, 175 Memorial Boulevard, Newport.

CABINETS

Gray's Ice Cream, open year-round at 16 East Road, Tiverton.

The Stone
House lawn



favorite place to vacation. We love it. We never want to leave. It's what you think of when you imagine a classic American summer. But it's also got a quirky vibe. I think that comes from adults not knowing they're adults."

ACT THREE: LITTLE COMPTON

One more bridge and I'm on the far eastern edge of the enchanted domain. I stop en route in the tiny town of Tiverton at Gray's Ice Cream for one of their famous coffee cabinets, a Rhode Island-specific term for an extra-thick shake, and another local specialty. The roadside stand has been the object of pilgrimages since it opened in 1923, and I can taste why. I linger farther on at the Art Cafe, a tiny, shingled shed with a bright red door, coffees, sweets, and the kind of small paintings that are so tempting to grab and treasure forever.

The road to Little Compton works a new, specific magic: narrow and winding through beautiful, open farmland gridded with stone walls—some in charming disrepair, others meticulously stacked—sloping down to the broad Sakonnet River. Farming and fishing have held sway here for centuries, and with those pursuits, a historic sense of quiet Yankee determination.

I check into the Stone House, Little Compton's only hotel. The four-story fieldstone mansion was built in 1854 by industrialist David Sisson and taken over by his son, Henry Tillinghast Sisson, a Civil War hero who also served as Rhode Island's lieutenant governor.

Strapped for cash, the younger Sisson hatched a scheme for an expansive summer community on his land and mapped out hundreds of building lots. (Unfortunately for Sisson, the venture failed.) The house became an inn in the early 20th century at a time when steamers regularly delivered visitors from Fall River and Providence and the place hopped with action. Sitting on the front porch overlooking a broad lawn and peaceful pond, it's hard to imagine any buzz here, ever.

To check my theory, I make the short drive to Sakonnet Point, Little Compton's southernmost tip, to see what's left of the old harbor. A grand hotel, dance hall, clam house, and a boardwalk are long gone, swept away by a tidal wave that topped the breakwater there in the 1938 hurricane. Though the Sakonnet Point Club still hosts the annual Fisherman's Ball, started

a year later to mark the storm's anniversary, it's not quite the raucous affair it was when it was held in the old Fo'c's'le bar. Back then, fish of all sizes served as tickets: According to a 1940 *Life* magazine account, one woman arrived with a single piece of caviar wrapped in a blanket, hoping to win the prize for the smallest fish.

In downtown Little Compton things are a bit livelier, thanks in part to the steady foot traffic at the Thursday Thrift Shop, which occupies a former horse barn just off the tiny town's triangular common. The Jimmy Choo pumps and St. John suits on display hint at the wealth of the residents who live down those long private drives I've seen. I ask the three gray-haired ladies behind the counter for dinner suggestions. They look at each other and laugh.

THE SKY IS HEAVY
WITH LAVENDER-
BOTTOMED CLOUDS.
THE AIR, SWEET
WITH HONEYSUCKLE
AND BEACH ROSE.
A HUMMINGBIRD
FLITS AMONG THE
BLOOMS.

"Well... there's the Commons. But it closes at 7 p.m."

"That's because we all go to bed at 8, you know."

"There's the pizza place... but they don't serve alcohol."

"We're assuming you'll want a cocktail?" one says brightly.

I said it was a valid assumption.

"Well... you could drive to Massachusetts."

Back at Stone House, I'm feeling a little put out. What kind of snoozy place is this? I graze on appetizers the inn has laid out, pour myself a glass of house wine, and back in my room, push the button to ignite the gas fireplace.

In the morning, I begin to have a better understanding of what kind of place this is. With coffee in hand, I start down the lane that skirts the pond. The sky is heavy with lavender-bottomed clouds. The air, sweet with honeysuckle and beach rose. A fairy-like hummingbird flits among the blooms. Above me, I hear movement, like clean sheets flapping on a line, and I look up to see a ragged line of geese. Then I round a bend and see a slip of a cove cupping the luminous sea. It is, I think, the kind of beguiling hideaway that might appeal to Wes Anderson, to creators of kingdoms. Waves explode on dark, hull-shaped rocks; a line of white froth trims the sand. Clouds shift, and a shaft of sunlight illuminates a distant lighthouse. I look up and see the geese swinging back around, over the pond, over the wind-bowed grasses, over my head. And they are sounding off now, their morning calls as clear and as rousing as reveille.