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WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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IMAGES FROM THE LAKE ESTATE ON WINNISQUAM

The pool area at the Lake Estate on Winnisquam will overlook the lake and the mountains.



Top left: A computer rendering of the ballroom at the Lake Estate on Winnisquam. The luxury hotel opening this summer in Tilton, N.H., has already booked several weddings. Above left: A computer rendering of a guest room at the resort. Above right: A computer rendering of the lounge area at the spa in the Lake Estate on Winnisquam.

Can a new luxury hotel give New Hampshire its first *five-star getaway?*



An upscale hotel opening this summer on Lake Winnisquam may finally land the Granite State on the Forbes list.



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER

TILTON, N.H. — When the Forbes Travel Guide releases its annual list of four- and five-star hotels and restaurants, New England always has a strong showing. Multiple properties in Boston and Cape Cod land on the list. Vermont and Rhode Island have five-star hotels, and Maine has four-star hotels. Connecticut also makes the list with what Forbes calls “recognized” hotels.

One New England state is consistently and conspicuously missing from the Forbes Guide: New Hampshire. When the 2025 list was announced on Feb. 12, New Hampshire was again MIA. Despite having several well-loved grand dame hotels, none has passed the rigorous standards necessary to appear on the Forbes list. Anonymous inspectors visit hotels worldwide and rate the properties based on 900 criteria.

But New Hampshire’s Forbes-less streak may soon come to an end. The team behind an \$85

Will this hotel be N.H.'s first 5-star getaway?

►HOTEL

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million luxury hotel opening this summer in Tilton is shooting for the stars — five, to be exact.

The Lake Estate on Lake Winnisquam, slated to open in June, will have 96 guest rooms and 18 suites in a 150,000-square-foot building designed to resemble grand cedar-shingled and stone summer cottages from the turn of the last century. It sits on 36 acres with two private beaches, an outdoor infinity pool, two hot tubs, an outdoor year-round heated mineral spa, four pickleball courts, one tennis court, an apple orchard, and flower and meditation gardens. In the distance, you can see the Belknap and Ossipee mountain ranges.

“We had a lot of people that said, ‘We love the Lakes Region of New Hampshire. We love the mountains of New Hampshire. We just wish there was a luxury hotel.’ Most of what’s here are roadside motels and cottage communities,” said Ed Rocco, general manager of the Lake Estate. “We have the Omni Mount Washington hotel. We have the Mountain View Grand in Whitefield, but those hotels are almost 200 years old. They don’t have the modern conveniences and the level of facilities we’ll have here.”

The Lake Estate will also have a 5,000-square-foot spa and salon. There’s a fitness center, beach-side bourbon bar, wine cellar, private screening room, poolside restaurant, fine dining restaurant, bar, library with a grand piano, and an expansive ballroom for weddings, complete with an in-house florist. For outdoor enthusiasts, there are walking and running trails, and at the lake, guests will have access to paddle boards, canoes, and kayaks. In the winter, there’s snowshoeing and firepits. Developers have installed an irrigation system and are planting 9,500 trees and shrubs.

“There’s just so many elements to this that it’s going to be really interesting to see how the dream comes into fruition,” Rocco said during a hardhat tour of the building. “But this is something that’s been four years in the making.”

The idea behind this grand hotel began with the Roccos. Ed and Patti Rocco have worked in hospitality for decades, managing properties for major chains in the Boston area, but they were ready to leave the corporate world, leave Boston, and start their own hotel in the Lakes Region. As it turns out, their neighbors, Dan and Elaine Dagesse, who own 28 auto dealerships in New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Massachusetts, were also looking to enter the luxury hotel business. To break it down in simple terms, the Roccos have the experience, the Dagesses have the capital.

“We are not a branded hotel. We’re



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF



THE LAKE ESTATE ON WINNISQUAM

independent,” Rocco said. “We won’t have any bank financing. We don’t have a management company running the place. It’s going to be Patti and I.”

Then there’s the matter of the Forbes rating. When the Roccos say they want to be a five-star hotel, they’re not wistfully talking about a distant pipe dream. They began by carefully researching other five-star properties. Throughout planning and construction, they’ve followed the standards the Forbes Travel

Guide set forth, leaving nothing to chance.

They don’t want the Lake Estate to feel like a new, soulless, cookie-cutter hotel. The idea is that the guest experience should be akin to staying at a large family lodge in the country — that is if you’re lucky enough to have come from a monied New England family. To do this, there are custom finishes throughout, such as 13 miles of crown molding. They brought in Boston-based interior

Above: Ed Rocco, general manager, and Patti Rocco, estate manager of the Lake Estate Winnisquam. The \$85 million hotel, which will have 96 guest rooms and 18 suites in a 150,000-square-foot building, is under construction and slated to open this summer.

Left: A computer rendering of the library that will be at the new luxury resort in Tilton, N.H.

designer Manuel de Santaren, who is best known for his work on residential interiors rather than hotels.

“The public areas are going to feel like somebody’s home,” de Santaren said. “At least that’s my intent, to give you the sense that when you walk in, you’ve arrived at some grand old, elegant lakeside manor house. We’re using quite a bit of reclaimed stone, and the slabs used for countertops are being leathered and antiques. There’s not go-

ing to be a lot of shiny new-looking things. I’m peppering a lot of the public spaces with antiques, and quite a bit of the art at the estate will be mid- to late-19th-century American.”

De Santaren has scoured auction houses up and down the East Coast for antiques hoping to re-create the look and feel of the grand hotels he’s stayed at over the years in the Adirondacks, Western Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia,

“I’m a very sensory-guided person,” he said. “I’m even thinking about what the flowers will be, what smell they’re going to have, and what you’re going to notice as you’re walking into the lobby.”

The guest rooms and suites range from 430 to 1,100 square feet. Items in the minibar (with the exception of alcohol) are free and replenished daily. Most rooms have private balconies and views of the lake. Prices are based on room category and season. Expect to pay anywhere from \$399 during mud season to \$1,900 per night during the height of summer.

Just don’t ask the Roccos if there’s a market for vacationers looking to drop that kind of coin for a hotel in New Hampshire. They visibly bristle at the question.

“We’ve looked at all of our competitors within a 15- to 20-minute drive from here,” said Patti, who is the estate manager of the hotel. “These are hotels that are older, haven’t updated in decades, and one is getting \$700 a night for a low-end room during the summer. And these places are sold out. That tells you there’s a demand in this area.”

They’re also banking on locals coming to dine at the restaurant, hang out at the bar, and visit the spa. They’ve already booked more than 20 weddings, with receptions in the ballroom, which was built in the style of an Amish barn.

The Roccos know that securing a Forbes rating requires much more than a heated mineral pool and high-thread-count sheets. The guide examines customer service as carefully as a hotel’s amenities. They’re building a management team but know it will take a long time to reach their full potential.

“We’re not going to get there on day one,” Ed said. “It’s going to take a while to establish a culture and a brand. Because we’re independent, we get to think about these things in depth and work to develop a product that speaks to the region, the history, and appeals to that customer who wants a refined experience.”

However, if they successfully establish that brand and culture, Lake Estate would join the more than 2,000 hotels that Forbes recognizes, and, long last, New Hampshire would no longer be a luxury hotel desert.

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