

One wine cellar. 25 fireplaces. 30 miles of crown molding. Is this the swankiest hotel in NH?

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Todd Bookman/NHPR. Ed and Patti Rocco, co-owners and managers of the Lake Estate, inside the resort earlier this summer.

New Hampshire's Lakes Region has always offered a bit of everything for travelers: From roadside inns and upscale waterfront rentals, to spider-filled second homes with moldy showers.

What the region has been lacking — at least according to one development team — is something at the very high-end. Fancy. Five star.

And they're hoping their new project, the Lake Estate, will fill that gap. The 114-room hotel, nestled on the western shore of Lake Winnisquam in Tilton, is scheduled to open next month.

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“When you walk into the hotel, you see the exterior and interior, you're going to see the quality of this, and you're going to say, ‘Boy, I can only imagine what the investment must have looked like,’ ” Ed Rocco, an owner and general manager, told me recently from the inside of a construction trailer in the hotel's parking lot.



Courtesy of The Lake Estate on Winnisquam. The 114-acre resort is perched on the western bank of Lake Winnisquam.

The investment, Rocco disclosed without much prodding, is now approaching \$90 million. Dan and Elaine Dagesse, who own a chain of car dealerships across New England, are the main financial backers. Rocco and his wife Patti, who is also deeply involved in the project, bring decades of experience in hospitality to the team.

“We're taking that hotel experience and bringing it to the next level,” said Patti. “Hoping to get, aspiring to get, our five star, five diamond recognition.”

If you aren't steeped in the hospitality world, getting a five star ranking from [Forbes](#), and a five diamond badge from the [travel authorities at AAA](#), is rarefied air for a hotel. There aren't any properties in New Hampshire that currently hold that distinction.

To earn that status, the resort has to excel at both the big and little things. From meticulous landscaping — there are more than 9,000 trees, shrubs and other plantings on the property — to a head-scratchingly large amount of molding.

“We're up to 30 miles of crown molding and baseboard in the hotel,” Ed Rocco estimates.

The resort is also fully ADA compliant, offers turndown service, valets, and a private water closet in each room.

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Throw in one wine cellar, 25 individual fireplaces, 3,400 feet of waterfront, and doors costing \$8,000 for each hotel room — pretty soon you’ve got a \$90 million hotel on your hands.

\$8,000 doors?

“It's a solid door,” Ed Rocco explained to a baffled reporter. “People are paying a luxury rate. They're expecting luxury furnishings and luxury experience.”

More than bells and whistles

New Hampshire has a handful of well-known resorts, from the Omni Mount Washington in the White Mountains to the coastal Wentworth by the Sea. But the Lake Estate is coming to a part of the state perhaps better known for Bike Week and the Tilt'n Diner than for glamorous getaways.

But the owners think demand for high-end luxury will be there.

“Take Tilton out of the equation and make it Lake Winnisquam,” said Patti. “Tilton is the gateway to the Lakes Region. It's going to put Tilton on the map.”

The price tag for a night here will put it out of step with most of the nearby lakefront hotels.



Courtesy of The Lake Estate on Winnisquam. An artist's rendering of the planned lounge inside of the Lake Estate, which is set to open its doors next month.

Rooms at the Lake Estate this year, while the hotel still finds its footing, will start at \$400. But during the high season, those prices could climb closer to \$800, with suites ranging from \$1,200 to \$2,000, according to Patti Rocco, along with a daily \$45 resort fee.

More than a dozen weddings are already on the books for this year.

“We have a salon, so that our brides or any house guests can come and have their hair done,” said Ed Rocco. There’s also a full spa in the lower level, should you need to relax post-nuptials.

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There are two restaurants in-house, with menus created by chef Chris Viaud, a James Beard nominee and Top Chef contestant [with roots in the state](#). A hamburger will start at around \$26.

Christopher Muther, the Boston Globe's travel writer, is [following the development](#) of the property. He said that initially, he expects New Englanders who like to splurge on their hotels to give the facility a try. Eventually, if reviews are good and splashy travel magazines like Conde Nast feature the property, the Lake Estate could draw visitors from across the country.

But he said success will depend on the level of service: Premium prices have to be matched by premium staffing.

"It's not just about the bells and whistles and the kidney shaped pool, and the fireplaces," he said. "It's really about the experience that people take away."

The Lake Estate has hired 130 full-time employees, some of whom have never worked at this level of resort.



Courtesy of The Lake Estate on Winnisquam. An artist's rendering of the entryway to the hotel, which will employ more than 130 people.

"We're all going to be learning together," said Ed Rocco. "We're going to be making quite a few mistakes initially, and we're going to figure it out." He's optimistic that over time, they will master what it takes to please a demanding clientele.

With weeks to go before the hotel's formal opening, there's still time to iron out any kinks. On the day I got a tour, 250 or so contractors were still on site, installing carpets and banquettes, finishing ceilings and the sinks in the spa.

It wasn't hard to imagine the final product, though: the feel of the Lake Estate is similar to the grand dame hotels of New Hampshire, like the Mount Washington and the Wentworth, both of

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which trace their roots to the 19th century. Everything on this 35-acre spot of land in Tilton, though, is brand new.

“We've had people say, ‘You need to bring ‘White Lotus’ here,’ ” Patti said, referencing the HBO hit series set at luxurious resorts in far flung destinations. “That's what this building reminds them of. So maybe down the road, if our PR person can make that happen.”