

An **AMERICAN SUMMER**

DEPARTURES

JULY/AUGUST 2011

≡ LOBSTERS ≡
- TO GO -

Live \$5²⁵ - #
Cooked \$6²⁵ - #

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Blue Hill **MAINE** • *On Tour with Singer* **ROSANNE CASH**
MONTANA'S RANCH *at Rock Creek* • **DELTA BLUES** *Diana*
Jewels of the **PAINTED DESERT** • *Golfing* **CAPE COD**

The Inn at Willow Grove, bathed in a summer sunset

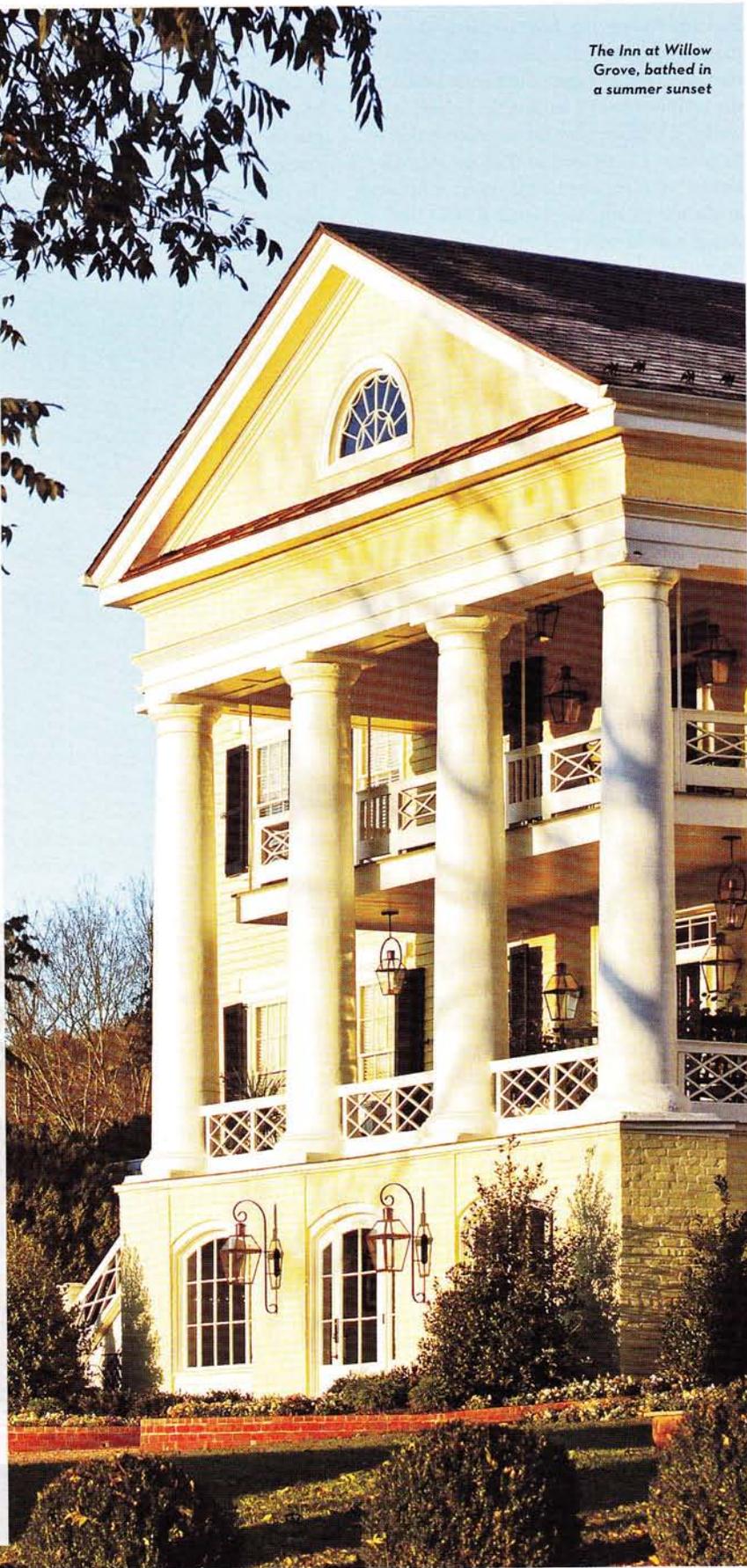
THE ESSENTIAL INN

New Southern Comfort

History moves forward as The Inn at Willow Grove opens its doors—redone, remade, reborn.

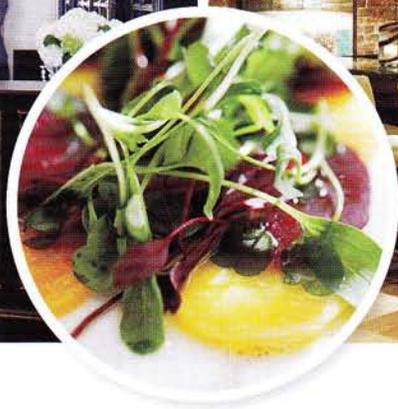
Houses, like horses, have good bones. In Orange, Virginia, a hamlet a few leagues north of Charlottesville, ground, horses and homes are the trinity around which life revolves. Walking through The Inn at Willow Grove, a new 11-room property housed in a 1778 plantation mansion, co-owner David Scibal runs his palm over the burlap cotton-covered walls of the salon, where guests gather nightly for sundowners. “When we found the house,” he says, patting an oak balustrade, “it was in disrepair. The floor was crooked. The roof was sagging. The walls were buckling. But it had good bones.”

After a multimillion-dollar two-year restoration, the inn opened its doors in October last year and showed exactly what good bones (and a lot of work) can do. Approaching the property—37 acres of fallow tobacco fields studded with willows and white pines—it seems a typical antebellum estate: four smooth, equidistant columns, two latticed balconies (one Jeffersonian), an easy yellow façade amid the lush green hills of the Piedmont. And the





A vintage map and clean white walls welcome guests; downstairs at Vintage, the feeling is warm and the food is fresh.



On the grounds of the inn, the **ONLY TWEETS** are from finches, sparrows, kestrels and wrens.

porch. There's nothing quite as simultaneously imposing and welcoming as a Southern porch, and this one—of generous proportion, with four rocking chairs facing westerly—wouldn't be out of place in a Margaret Mitchell novel. It is not difficult to imagine the hills dotted with fires of the troops that encamped here during the Civil War.

This continuity—with the land, with time—is important in a county where many homes still bear the names given to them in the 1700s. Scibal, a former surfer from New Jersey turned insurance executive, and his wife, Charlene, have wed the new with the old. The Inn at Willow Grove is a sleeper cell of modernity. "It's urban meets plantation," says Charlene in her soft Louisiana drawl, leading me into the Master Suite, one of four guest rooms in the main house. Above the fireplace is a breathtaking abstract painting by a young Florida artist named Libby Pressnall. WiFi, invisible, permeates the room.

Clustered around but at a respectful distance from the main house, past gardens, plots and fountains, are a clutch of cottages that, in the estate's former life, housed

weavers, butlers, slaves and schoolmasters. Each has been reborn as a charming suite with all the luxury talismans one expects. (Anichini linens, Natura mattresses, heated floors—the things that are a pleasure to experience and a bore to read described.) Every morning, fresh beignets, a nod to Charlene's parish past, arrive in a brown paper bag, as good as those from Café Du Monde. The only tweets here are from sparrows, finches, kestrels and wrens.

The beignets come courtesy of chef Jeff Daniels and his restaurant, Vintage. Like the best, truest gastropubs, Vintage cloaks its ambitious hauteur under exposed beams and rusticity. Comfortable, yes, but soigné nonetheless. Daniels's menu is imaginative farm-to-table. The pecan-crusted lamb loin—from

a farm owned, incongruously, by former CIA head Porter Goss—is served with leek and potato gratin. Morels, called locally "miracles" and pronounced locally "merkles," are served in a forest mushroom risotto. An eight-course tasting menu might include red-eye barbecue quail on a round of watermelon.

After dinner, as daylight dwindles, the Blue Ridge Mountains grow ever bluer in the distance. One feels the past pressing the present. One feels the lovely bones of The Inn at Willow Grove, finally straightened out and standing proud. But most importantly, one feels at home. —J.D.S.

Rooms start at \$250; 14079 Plantation Way, Orange, Virginia; 540-672-7001; theinnatwillowgrove.com.

TERROIR

WELCOME TO THE OCTAGON

Thomas Jefferson excelled at many things, life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness among them. But he was a crummy winemaker. Though not for lack of trying. In 1773, he used cuttings from his Italian neighbor, Philip Mazzei, in one of his first attempts to plant vineyards at Monticello. The vines perished.

In the 21st century, though, Jefferson's vision

is coming true, thanks again to an Italian. Piemonte-born Luca Paschina has been the vintner for the last 20 years at **Barboursville Vineyards**, on the former estate of Virginia governor James Barbour. Visitors can stroll the ruins of the governor's mansion and tiptoe through the vines. The label does brisk business in Petit Verdot, Viognier and Pinot Noir, but it's

the Merlot blend Octagon (\$40)—named after one of Jefferson's favorite architectural shapes—that has brought it renown. It was even served at the White House during President Obama's inauguration. Fittingly, Barboursville now produces wine bottled under the Monticello label. President Jefferson is redeemed at last. barboursville.wine.net. —J.D.S.

