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New England **Travel**

The Dream Away Lodge is a find (and a little hard to find)

By **Karen Campbell** Globe correspondent, September 18, 2018, 4:52 p.m.

1



The Dream Away Lodge is a go-to destination during tourist season and a favorite gathering place for locals off season. JEFF FAY

BECKET — If we hadn't been in the company of seasoned regulars, we surely would have thought we were lost. The road to the Dream Away Lodge is well off the beaten path, long and narrow and framed by what seems like miles and miles of thick woods. But then you round a bend and there it is, like a magical oasis — windows

aglow, fairy lights twinkling in the trees, an open fire, ringed by inviting chairs, blazing in a stone pit on the expansive lawn. The neon sign atop the 200-year-old farmhouse sets the retro tone of this eclectically delightful bar/restaurant. A legendary Berkshires gem for almost a century, it's a hopping go-to destination during tourist season and a favorite gathering place for locals off season as well. (It's open from St. Patrick's Day through Thanksgiving weekend.)

But the adventure begins before you even step inside the building. Located just on the edge of the 18,000-acre October Mountain State Forest, the restaurant sits on its own 50 verdant acres. We got there just before night settled, so we were able to take in the colorful gardens and walk through the lodge's lovely wildflower meditation labyrinth. Had we arrived earlier, the grounds open to miles of walking trails, birch groves, ponds, and a popular event space in a forest glade known as the Wedding Rock. Our friends' daughter claims she's getting married there — pending the acquisition of a prospective husband.

The big white farmhouse was reportedly a brothel and speakeasy during the Great Depression, before “Mamma Maria Frasca and her three musical daughters” transformed it into a lodge in the mid-1940s. Though it hasn't been an actual overnight lodge since the 1950s, it became a favorite nighttime spot for local bands as well as elite musicians. Arlo Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Allen Ginsberg, and the Rolling Thunder Revue all visited in the mid '70s, and Dylan featured the place in his film “Renaldo and Clara.”

In 1997, Mama Frasca's oldest daughter, Tess, sold the lodge to Daniel Osman, who crafted it into its current incarnation as a cozy, warm restaurant/bar with live music (or art, theater, cabaret, spoken word events) almost every night, including a popular open mic Hootenanny on Wednesdays. The son of folk singing parents, Osman spent more than 35 years in the theater, supplementing his career as an actor/director/producer with extra work in the food and hospitality industry. He has imbued Dream Away Lodge with a quirky theatrical flair — he calls it a kind of “reality dinner theater,” his “longest running and most critically acclaimed production.” Special events sprinkled throughout the year take it up a notch. “Halloween here rocks,” he says.

Playful and homey, the restaurant's vibe is shabby chic, with multi-hued, mismatched linens, dishware, and furniture. Kitschy knickknacks, signs, books, and colorful art abound. The bawdy bathroom art (affectionately dubbed the “Loo Gallery”) is worth a special visit. The bar, constructed of multicolored light blocks, is presided over by a naked picture of Marilyn Monroe. It's a loose, open feel. From Memorial Day through Labor Day you can eat outside as well. Patterson the dog and cats Stoner and Sam (all named to recall the Rolling Thunder Revue) casually wander in and out.



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However, people come not just for the atmosphere, but for the imaginative and affordable menu of really fresh locally grown and sourced food. Berkshire native Amy Loveless, raised on a farm in Stockbridge, brings authenticity and integrity to her “farm to table” dishes as the restaurant’s head chef since 2008. She also favors an eclectic mix of Mexican, Middle Eastern, and Asian flavors in her seasonal menus, with modest offerings of gluten-free, vegetarian, and vegan options, making this a sweet spot for a big group with mixed dietary needs. She makes desserts in her commercial kitchen at home each morning, and they’re well worth the calories, and the burgers (sirloin and local grass-fed, when available) are outstanding, including the tastiest lentil burger we’ve ever had.

A surprisingly extensive wine list offers glasses and bottles from around the world, but don’t miss the excellent cocktails as well: The place is known for its margaritas, which are sharp and crisp with just the right amount of lime. A wide selection of teas and quite excellent coffee are free and self serve, which is a gracious, chill-busting amenity on cool nights.

Music continues to be a big draw into the post-dinner hours. During the summer performing arts season, actors, dancers, and musicians dropping by after shows can ramp it up to a party-like energy. We finished dinner just as a local band — a trio of guitarists and a harmonica player — were starting to lay down some sweet bluegrass in the music room. You can squeeze in and settle down in one of the padded pews, grab a chair, or just loiter by one of the doorways until you’ve had your fill, which

was what we did, happy to stand after a long sit down over a terrific meal. And when we headed out into the night back toward our car, the music came with us, gently wafting through open windows to send us on our way.

Dream Away Lodge, 1342 County Road, Becket, www.thedreamawaylodge.com, 413-623-8725.

Karen Campbell can be reached at karencampbell4@rcn.com.