

ANDREW HARPER'S Hideaway Report[®]

FEBRUARY 2022

SINCE 1979

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The Cantons de l'Est, also known as the Eastern Townships, is a region of rolling hills and flat countryside peppered with apple orchards, vineyards and lakes. Bordering Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire, the region was settled in the late 1780s by Loyalists fleeing the United States after the American Revolution. With the area's multitude of covered

bridges, Victorian-era towns and tidy Protestant churches, New Englanders will feel right at home.

Our first stop was the 31-room **Ripplecove Hotel & Spa**, located a 90-minute drive east of Montréal. Set on a 12-acre peninsula that juts into Lake Massawippi, and within walking distance of the quaint downtown of Ayer's Cliff, this property debuted in

1945 as a summer fishing retreat. The inn, painted a cheerful yellow, stands on sloping lawns flanked by century-old white pines.

The young woman at the front desk directed us toward our Prestige Suite in the hotel's newer building a few steps away, which opened in September 2021. Interchangeably called the Pavilion and the Ripplecove Condo-Hotel,

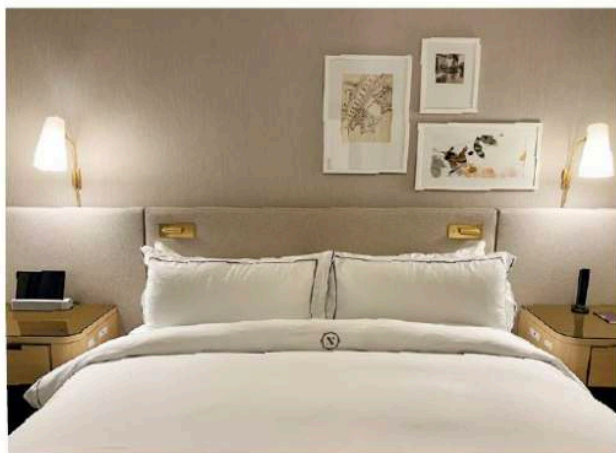
Andrew Harper editors travel anonymously and pay full rate for all lodging, meals and related expenses.

Since the launch of the *Hideaway Report* in 1979, featured hotels and restaurants have been selected on a completely independent basis.

For comments and inquiries, please email memberservices@andrewharper.com.

Rediscovering Boston's Civilized Charm

Grand hotels, boutique hideaways, elegant architecture and superlative seafood



Bedroom and sitting area of our Classic Suite, The Newbury Boston



For decades, the Ritz-Carlton hotel stood at the corner of Arlington and Newbury streets, just across from Boston's Public Garden. It had opened in this ideal location in 1927, and over subsequent years enjoyed a reputation as an unofficial clubhouse for Boston's elite, as well as a starchy upholder of traditional etiquette and values. (In 1981, fresh off a TWA flight from London, I myself was summarily ejected from the lobby for the offense of wearing bluejeans.) In 2006, to widespread Bostonian dismay, the Ritz was sold and renamed Taj Boston. (Today, a new Ritz-Carlton is located a 10-minute walk away.) This ownership ended in 2016. After a multimillion-dollar renovation, during which the public areas were reinvented and the property's historic ballrooms were restored, the

hotel finally reopened in May 2021 as **The Newbury Boston**.

Revolving doors on both Newbury and Arlington streets provide access to the restyled lobby, which has a dramatic black marble floor and sweeping staircase covered by a sapphire-blue carpet. The atmosphere is at once intimate and opulent, traditional and contemporary. To one side is the Street Bar, a famous Boston meeting place that does not seem to have changed greatly in the hotel's redesign. The walls are still paneled, firelight flickers on shelves of hardbound books, and a row of green-leather stools fronts a bar stocked, apparently, with every known whiskey and gin.

As our room was not ready, we decided to have a light lunch at the adjoining casual restaurant. An exceptionally friendly waiter, who lost no

time in telling us that his career dated from the days when the hotel was still a Ritz-Carlton, brought us deviled eggs, a turkey club sandwich and a delicious crab salad. Afterward, we spent a while reading beside the fire in the adjacent Library, a serene lounge for the exclusive use of residents.

The Newbury now has 286 accommodations, of which 90 are suites. I had reserved a Park View King, whose window provided an outlook of tree-tops rather than the Public Garden. At 390 square feet, the room felt slightly cramped, with much of the space being taken up by a king-size bed and the ottoman at its foot. Otherwise it was furnished with just a small round table — adequate for a room service breakfast but of little use as a workspace, two bucket chairs and a pale wood dresser. The color scheme was a restful combination of gray and slate blue. The bath provided a single sink and a marble-lined walk-in shower. Arlington Street is a busy thoroughfare, and the hum of traffic was clearly audible, though not overly intrusive. The following morning, we decided to move to a Classic Suite (780 square feet). I suspect that many Harper members would be likely to do the same.

Tuna crudo with artichoke and anchovies and scallops with garlic, olive oil and chile at Contessa restaurant



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The walls are still paneled, firelight flickers on shelves of hardbound books, and a row of green-leather stools fronts a bar stocked with every known whiskey and gin.

Unusual for a hotel of this type, The Newbury Boston doesn't have a spa, but it does offer a large fitness center with Peloton bikes. The most notable amenity at the property is its rooftop restaurant, Contessa, located on the 17th floor. This is now under the management of the Major Food Group, a New York-based company, where its well-known establishments include Carbone and Santina.

The principal drawback of Contessa is its popularity, which means that it can be extremely difficult to get a reservation, even for Newbury guests. Hotel restaurants that don't set aside a few of their tables for people staying in-house are a pet peeve of mine, so I was frustrated by my conversation with an otherwise charming and helpful concierge who said that, alas, it was unlikely that an opening for dinner would arise. Fortunately, his pessimism proved unfounded.

Contessa is a striking 4,000-square-foot glass-enclosed space with a panoramic view over the Boston skyline.

Its interior, by San Francisco designer Ken Fulk, is intended to evoke the ambience of a north Italian palazzo. Be that as it may, it is undeniably an exceptionally stylish space. We opted for burrata with tomato and anchovies and tuna crudo with artichoke hearts. These appetizers were followed by grilled branzino, and scallops, with olive oil, garlic and slivers of chile. The scallops were tender and delicately flavored, with no trace of chewiness. Throughout our meal, the service was friendly and attentive.

Thanks to millions lavished to good effect, The Newbury Boston has regained much of its former allure. If you are planning a stay, however, avoid the smaller rooms and be sure to make an advance reservation for dinner at Contessa.

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The Newbury's principal competitor for the title of the city's leading grand hotel is the Four Seasons Hotel Boston, located a four-minute walk away on Boylston Street. (In May 2019, a second Four Seasons property debuted on Dalton Street in Back Bay.) However, another potential rival reopened on June 30 last year after a two-year refurbishment. **The Langham, Boston** is situated at the heart of the downtown financial district and is contained within an imposing stone building, which was constructed in 1922 to house

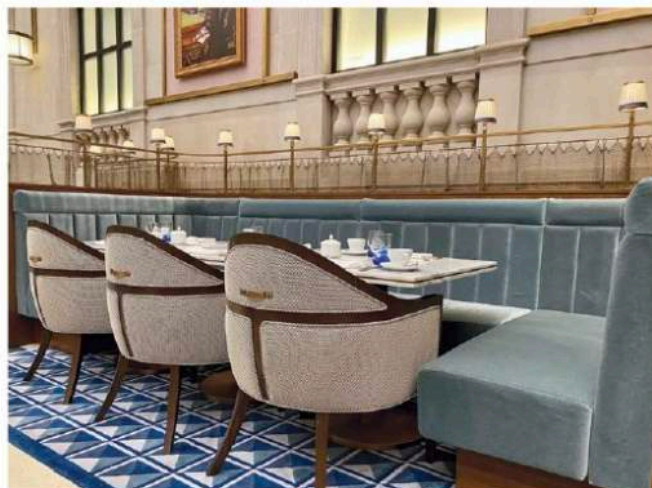
Boston's U.S. Federal Reserve Bank.

Alas, our visit did not get off to an auspicious start, as we were studiously ignored by the doorman, who was deep in an important conversation with an acquaintance. Having dragged my suitcase into the lobby myself, I was more than ready to be grumpy at check-in. Fortunately, the receptionist was charm personified.

Our Executive Club Room created an immediately favorable impression, owing to a soothing color palette of blue, gray and beige; subtle lighting; elegant contemporary furniture; and imaginative design details, such as brown leather handles secured by brass strips on the doors of the minibar and a tartan-covered back to a caramel leather chair. It was only as we began to unpack that we had second thoughts. At 400 square feet, the room was not large, and we soon discovered that it had been designed for the comfort of a single occupant, presumably on business. There was only one luggage rack, storage and hanging space were extremely limited, and the well-lit marble bath offered only a single sink. Essentially, we were faced with the same problem we had encountered at The Newbury: To ensure the comfort of two people, it would be necessary to move to a higher room category.

I headed downstairs to consult with the friendly receptionist, who immediately took me to see a 550-square-foot

Our Executive Club Room and tables at Grana restaurant, The Langham, Boston



duplex Loft Suite. This was roomy and attractive, but it too had only a single sink in the bath. And although it provided two closets, one was inconveniently located downstairs next to the living area. Seeing my doubtful expression, he proposed an inspection of an 800-square-foot One Bedroom Suite. But the cost seemed excessive, and I decided to stay put.

The Langham offers two contrasting restaurants: The Fed for casual dining and Grana for classic Italian dishes. The former resembles a British-style gastropub and has a large central bar, dark wood wainscoting, small marble bistro tables and walls strewn with an eclectic array of artwork. At 6:30 p.m., the atmosphere was lively, with the blue leather bar stools fully occupied by people from surrounding offices enjoying a drink or three on their way home from work.

We were ushered to a table at one side of the hubbub. The menu features New England classics like lobster chowder, as well as seafood towers of oysters, scallops and jumbo shrimp — plus options for carnivores such as a “10 mile charcuterie board.” I settled for the smoked bluefish pâté, followed by crispy cod. The Fed is one of those boisterous and happy places, with cheerful young staff, that cannot fail to lift one’s spirits.

The following morning we had breakfast at Grana, which occupies the former Federal Reserve Bank’s grand hall, a magnificent space with a translucent glass roof, huge chandeliers and original inlaid stone floors. I opted for oatmeal with cinnamon, green apple and grapes (which was delicious), followed by scrambled eggs (which were overcooked). Fortunately, the croissants were impeccable, and the service was proactive and charming. Alas, owing to the brevity of our stay, we did not have time to try Grana’s Italian cuisine at dinner.

Other amenities at the property include a heated indoor pool and a fitness center with Technogym equipment and Peloton bikes. In many ways, The Langham is a fine hotel, and I am tempted to recommend it. But with 312 rooms and suites, it is larger than most of those I endorse. And its intended clientele are clearly people on business in the surrounding financial district. For leisure travelers, The Newbury offers a better location, close to numerous shops and restaurants, as well as proximity to the Public Garden and Boston Common.

As a contrast to these two grand hotels, I had decided to stay at the 16-room **Inn @ St. Botolph**, situated on a quiet tree-lined street in the South

The Inn @ St. Botolph, South End



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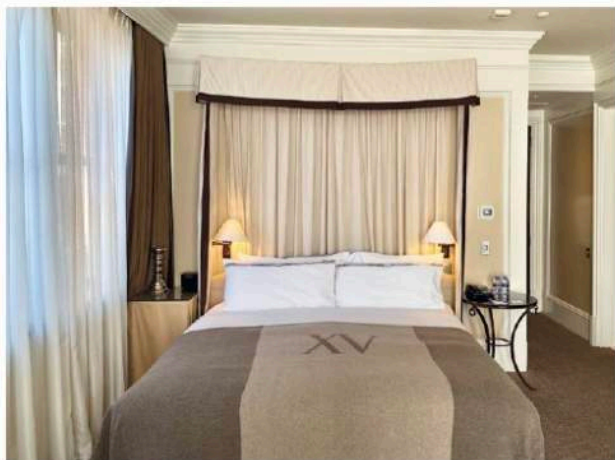
Despite having had the experience hundreds of times, it is always strangely depressing when a property falls so far short of expectations.

End neighborhood, and set within a brownstone townhouse. The inn is owned by the Columbus Hospitality Group, which makes it a sister property to our long-recommended XV Beacon Hotel. As well as being a potential hideaway, it seemed as though it might offer comfortable and tranquil accommodations in a convenient location, at an appealing price point. Full of confidence, I mounted the steps and buzzed myself into the building using the access code that I had received via text. (An office is staffed from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., but there is no permanent reception.) Unfortunately, my optimism proved to have been misplaced.

Although the One Bedroom Suite was spacious, with a separate living area, plus a kitchenette, the lighting was poor and there were minor stains on the carpet, as well as small scratches and chips on the furniture. The bath was tiny, its single sink had a broken plug, and there was no bathmat. Fortunately, the queen-size bed turned out to be sufficiently comfortable, and I enjoyed a reasonable night’s sleep. In the morning, I headed down to the basement to investigate the advertised breakfast buffet. This seemed to consist primarily of a basket of bagels — no one was around to ask if I was missing something — but after a diligent search, I did manage to discover a small pot of strawberry yogurt.

Despite having had the experience hundreds of times, it is always strangely depressing when a property falls so far short of expectations.

For many years now, the 63-room **XV Beacon Hotel** has been the Boston



Bedroom of our Boston Common Studio, rooftop terrace and entrance, XV Beacon Hotel

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Until recently, XV Beacon Hotel had relatively little competition. Boston has several good large hotels but few distinguished smaller ones. This changed with the opening of The Whitney.

boutique property that has found the greatest favor with Harper members. It is housed within a turn-of-the-century structure built on 18th-century foundations and located a short walk from Boston Common and the Granary Burying Ground, the final resting place of John Hancock, Samuel Adams and Paul Revere. Although I have stayed at XV Beacon several times and come greatly to appreciate its well-appointed rooms, tranquil atmosphere and obliging staff, I decided to spend a night there to see how it had fared during the pandemic.

On arrival, the doorman was as affable as ever, the reception staff were polite and efficient, and the relatively small lobby, with its fireplace, dark paneled walls, zebra rugs and outsize abstract painting, was just as I remembered. I rode the old-fashioned cage elevator up to the ninth floor.

My chosen Boston Common Studio came with a king-size bed topped by a cashmere throw, a deep sofa, a gas-log fire and a sizable work table with a leather writing pad. The color scheme in shades of brown and taupe was restful; light flooded in through big windows; and the atmosphere was serene. A huge

closet meant that suitcases could be banished from sight. The room's only drawback was the relatively small bath, with a shower over a whirlpool tub. The standard of maintenance was immaculate. During my brief stay, the only deficiency I could attribute to the pandemic was slow room service, presumably due to a temporary shortage of staff. Otherwise, XV Beacon struck me as being as comfortable and civilized as ever. The hotel's popularity among members remains entirely well deserved.

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Until recently, XV Beacon Hotel had relatively little competition. Boston has several good large hotels but few distinguished smaller ones. This changed with the opening of **The Whitney Hotel** in June 2019, a 65-room boutique property at the edge of the Beacon Hill residential district. The hotel is housed chiefly within a red-brick building, built in 1909 as part of Massachusetts Eye and Ear hospital, which stands at the end of Charles Street overlooking the river. In 2017, the original structure was renovated, and an extension was added.

One of the principal merits of The Whitney is its location, just steps



from Beacon Hill's grid of lovely cobbled streets lined by Federal-style townhouses. Charles Street itself is an attractive and lively thoroughfare with a wide variety of shops and restaurants.

On arrival, we passed a row of complimentary bicycles that The Whitney provides for its guests and entered the light and spacious lobby. This is separated from the hotel's restaurant, Peregrine, by a floor-to-ceiling partition, into which is set a glass-fronted gas fire. Behind the marble check-in desk stood tall shelves filled with books by celebrated New England authors.

Many of the accommodations at The Whitney are relatively small. Classic King guest rooms, for example, are just 260 square feet, while Classic



Sitting area and bedroom of our Premium King Suite, The Whitney Hotel

Double Queen guest rooms measure 365 square feet. Fortunately, we had shown enough foresight to reserve a Premium King Suite, which turned out to be sufficiently spacious (500 square feet). Situated on a corner of the building, its wide floor-to-ceiling windows revealed a striking panoramic view of Cambridge Street, the mass transit's Red Line station, Massachusetts General Hospital, Longfellow Bridge and a sliver of the Charles River. Thanks to excellent soundproofing, traffic noise was not an issue, and during our two-night stay, I found myself endlessly captivated by the restless urban scene below.

The bedroom came with a king-size bed backed by a navy-blue quilted headboard, a charcoal-gray daybed and a dove-gray patterned, fitted carpet. Overall the design struck me as clean, contemporary and sophisticated. I appreciated the superabundance of drawers but was irked by the lack of hanging space. The well-lit white-tiled bath provided a huge walk-in shower and a single large rectangular sink set in white marble. A short corridor led to the suite's living room, which contained a small sofa, a nest of round tables and a 55-inch television.

At the urging of a charming receptionist, I had made a reservation at Peregrine for dinner. The attractive space has a pale wooden floor, purple walls, leather banquettes, an eight-seat

marble-topped bar and large windows that look out onto both bustling Charles Street and a serene interior courtyard garden with a fountain and a fire pit. The restaurant has garnered enthusiastic reviews for its "coastal Mediterranean" cuisine, and I was greatly looking forward to my meal, a sense of anticipation that only heightened my irritation when the server informed me that two

of the four main courses were unavailable due to "supply issues."

As yet, The Whitney doesn't display the same level of effortless professionalism exhibited by XV Beacon. But it is an aesthetically pleasing property and given that it is less than three years old, during which time the world has been mired in the pandemic, it is impossible not to be impressed. **HR**

THE NEWBURY BOSTON 94

LIKE The ideal location; the friendly concierge and reception staff; the atmospheric and timeless Street Bar; the large gym. **DISLIKE** The relatively small size of the Park View King rooms; the difficulty of securing a reservation at the Contessa rooftop Italian restaurant. **GOOD TO KNOW** Even though the hotel lacks a spa, there are several spas nearby on Newbury Street, at which the concierge is happy to make a reservation. *Park View King, \$1,050; Classic Suite, \$1,380. 1 Newbury Street. Tel. (617) 536-5700.*

THE LANGHAM, BOSTON 89

LIKE The grand and stylish public areas; the exceptionally helpful front desk staff; the lively casual restaurant, The Fed. **DISLIKE** The rooms seem to have been designed primarily for one person on business, rather than a couple on vacation. **GOOD TO KNOW** At the time of writing, the pool, whirlpool and sauna areas were closed. *Executive Club Room, \$1,160; One Bedroom Suite, \$2,460. 250 Franklin Street. Tel. (617) 451-1900.*

THE INN @ ST. BOTOLPH 85

LIKE The location convenient to Back Bay; the attractive brownstone building set on a tranquil tree-lined street. **DISLIKE** The poor state of maintenance; the tiny bath; the lackluster breakfast buffet. **GOOD TO KNOW** Fenway Park is located 1 mile away. *One Bedroom Suite, \$660; One Bedroom Deluxe Suite, \$700. 99 St. Botolph Street. Tel. (617) 236-8099.*

XV BEACON HOTEL 94

LIKE The residential feel of the well-appointed and very tranquil guestrooms; the effortless professionalism of the staff; the charming roof terrace. **DISLIKE** The lobby is dark, which makes it atmospheric in winter but a tad gloomy in summer. During our stay, room service was painfully slow. **GOOD TO KNOW** Although the hotel's restaurant, Moo, is a steakhouse, a range of seafood is also available. A complimentary Lexus limousine will transport guests anywhere in the city center. *Contemporary Classic Room, \$810; Boston Common Studio, \$1,100. 15 Beacon Street. Tel. (617) 670-1500.*

THE WHITNEY HOTEL 92

LIKE The proximity to Beacon Hill; the aesthetically pleasing public areas; the charming interior courtyard garden. **DISLIKE** The relatively small size of many rooms. **GOOD TO KNOW** The hotel can arrange sailing and boating trips on the Charles River nearby. *Charles River Corner King, \$870; Premium King Suite, \$1,280. 170 Charles Street. Tel. (617) 367-1866.*

Prices reflect average mid- to high-season rates (including taxes) and are subject to change.