

# New Hope's 1870 Wedgwood Inn

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Havens | New Hope/Lambertville

## **On Either Bank, a Delaware River Hideaway**

By **BETH GREENFIELD**

THE lure of kitsch led Leslie Herson to New Hope, Pa., but the nature and serenity of the region made her stay.

"Someone told me there was a flea market on Tuesdays, Rice's, so I went to check it out," said Ms. Herson, the owner of the Love Saves the Day vintage shop in the East Village section of Manhattan. "When I got there, I drove up and down River Road, and it was so beautiful — and I've lived in Hawaii, which it reminded me of."

That was 24 years ago, and Ms. Herson and her husband, Richie, have owned their country home, just on the outskirts of New Hope — along with the second outpost of Love Saves the Day, in the heart of downtown — since shortly thereafter.

"I live in a pocket that hasn't developed in 20 years, with a drop-dead view of the countryside," said Ms. Herson, who retains her rent-regulated East Village apartment but spends a lot of time in the ranch house the couple have transformed into a "sculptural living space" over the years. "What's kept me there is the beauty of Bucks County."

She's not alone. Many people from New York, Philadelphia and even suburban points in between continue to find their way to this quiet and accessible pocket to carve out a leisurely second-home existence.

New Hope, known for its bohemian history and daytripper-filled strip of shops and restaurants, is on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River; on the New Jersey side, in Hunterdon County, just across a steel bridge, is its sister town, Lambertville, known for its 19th-century town houses and a less-discovered charm that has earned it a nickname as "the left bank." Whichever side you choose, homeowners say, the sense of escape from urban hustle — whether from New York, about 90 minutes away, or Philadelphia, about 50 minutes — is priceless.

"When you get here, you could be hundreds of miles away from the city," said Terrence Meck, 28. Mr. Meck and his partner, Rand Skolnick, 47, bought an 18th-century stone house a mile out of New Hope's town center — along with the popular gay resort and restaurant, the Raven — three years ago.

"My partner's parents have a farm in the area, so we've spent lots of time here," said Mr. Meck, whose other residence is in Manhattan. "We just fell in love with it."

## **The Scene**

Residents describe both towns as tight-knit, diverse and open-minded. "People are so friendly, and really sophisticated," said Julie Levinson, 38, a freelance graphic artist. "You have gay, straight, old, young, everything." She and her husband, Bill, 49, a lawyer and musician, bought a two-bedroom stone house on the Delaware Canal in New Hope for \$630,000 in July 2005; their main residence is in Watchung, N.J.

The combination of rustic quiet and the bustle of the main strips in both New Hope and Lambertville makes it easy for homeowners to hop back and forth between extremes, or to stick to the one that suits them. Both towns front the Delaware River and feature miles of waterfront bicycling and jogging paths — including the 60-mile towpath in Delaware Canal State Park in New Hope, parts of which stay closed from flooding in 2004 and 2005, and a similar, shorter towpath along the New Jersey-side canal.

Narrow country roads are great for old-fashioned Sunday drives, with sprawling antiques markets providing treasure-hunt stops along the way. In town, residents and visitors alike stroll back and forth across the New Hope-Lambertville Bridge and walk through the streets and lanes of each town, browsing in the many antiques shops of Lambertville and ambling in and out of hip clothing, housewares and souvenir shops in New Hope.

The crowds are thick on summer weekends, with the many B & B's, fine restaurants, theaters and pubs filling up with both locals and visitors — especially during one of the many area festivals, like Lambertville's Shad Fest in late April (the 29th and 30th this year) or the New Hope Gay Pride Weekend in May (May 19 to 21 this year).

The Levinsons love the social aspect. "It's gotten us as a couple out of the house," Ms. Levinson said. "We'll get on our bicycles, go out and hear music, use our kayaks, and we have company all the time."

## **Pros**

Best for second-home owners is its accessibility to Philadelphia and New York, on roads rarely if ever clogged with traffic — unlike a trip to the Hamptons, everyone is quick to point out. Real estate is also more affordable than in other regional second-home enclaves, like the Jersey Shore or the East End of Long Island.

The population is gay-friendly. New Hope has a local law that bans discrimination based on sexual orientation. "It's one of the most diverse and accepting communities I've been in," Mr. Meck said.

## **Cons**

Though there is not much traffic on the way, parking downtown can be a problem in both towns, residents say. Getting errands done on summer weekends can be difficult when the main street is clogged with daytrippers. "If you don't like the notion of a tourist destination, it might not be for you," Mr. Levinson said.

## **The Real Estate Market**

Properties on either side of the river are almost always old and include riverfront bungalows, 1950's Cape Cods, 250-year-old stone farmhouses and gatekeepers' houses.

"When people come to Lambertville, they want something older, and right downtown," said Vivian Hackney of the E. J. Lelie Agency in Lambertville. "There are many town houses here dating from 1874, 1865."

Many two- or three-bedroom town houses can be found for \$400,000 to \$500,000, Ms. Hackney said, and they tend to sell quickly. Single-family detached houses go for \$500,000 and up.

Steven A. Walny of R. A. Weidel Realtors (and the owner of NewHope-RealEstate.com) said he sees a range of second-home buyers, from those who want a rural riverfront hideaway to those who desire a place right in town. Some look for town-house associations, where maintenance is taken care of, and others choose a condo in one of two newer constructions in New Hope, where units start at around \$500,000.

Something to keep in mind, Mr. Walny added, is that although New Jersey homes often have a larger lot size, Pennsylvania has much lower taxes, generally about half of those in New Jersey, he said.

On the high end, houses can easily go for \$5 million, \$6 million or more. "Prices have been steadily and quickly going up for about six years," Mr. Walny said.

Lisa James Otto, owner of Lisa James Otto Country Properties — which has offices in both New Hope and Stockton, N.J., near Lambertville — just sold a 1720, two-bedroom farmhouse in nearby Solebury Township for \$7 million. "I've sold houses to actors, models, film producers and authors," she said. "They don't necessarily want to be in the Hamptons and have to see the same people every weekend. They like their privacy."