

The countryside south of Great
Barrington, Massachusetts.

WELCOME

TO THE NEW

BERKSHIRES

In the rolling hills of western Massachusetts,
Dani Shapiro finds a classic summer-in-the-country
destination—with its renowned outdoor concerts
and theater programs—being remade with the latest
brand of artisanal, farm-to-table sophistication.

Photographed by Jessica Antola

Guide + Map > Page 90

T

The first time I met Berkshires butcher Jeremy Stanton, he asked me if I wanted an interesting pig. “You know, a rootin’, tootin’, mushroom-hunting one.” I’m a Jewish girl, raised kosher, from suburban New Jersey. I didn’t know anything about pigs, much less that they could be interesting. But my husband and I were hosting a pig roast with some friends at their Connecticut home, and an interesting pig was in order. These friends were old-school Czech, and before he knew it, Stanton was not only supplying an interesting pig but had been handed elaborate recipes—only partly in English—that I had discovered for things that could be done with pig organs, and skin, and feet. I didn’t eat much at that pig roast, but its mastermind made an impression. A couple of years later, when Stanton opened the Meat Market in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, I sensed that a key moment in the evolution of the Berkshires had arrived.

The Berkshires have long been a cultural destination, of course. Tanglewood, the Lenox summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, provides a sound track ranging from Shostakovich to James Taylor. Driving past those legendary gates on a summer afternoon, it’s possible to hear Yo-Yo Ma or Joshua Bell rehearsing through your open car window. The historic Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival is 30 minutes east in Becket. Some of the best regional theater in the country can be found at the Williamstown Theatre Festival—where regulars include Patricia Clarkson, Sam Rockwell, and Blythe Danner. The area also has a significant literary history: Edith Wharton considered the Mount, in Lenox, her first real home; there, she wrote *The House of Mirth* and entertained her good friend Henry James. In a later era, the Berkshires saw many of the most famous children of the 1960’s; on any given night, you might hear Bob Dylan, Arlo Guthrie, or Joan Baez making music at the Dream Away Lodge—a magical, hard-to-find bar, restaurant, and live-music joint in Becket, on the edge of October Mountain State Forest, where diners now wander the wildflower meditation labyrinth, cocktails in hand.

This varied history can be found—and felt—in the community’s passionate commitment to the arts, as well as in the style of the place, its homegrown, neo-bohemian atmosphere. But a different kind of worldliness has recently emerged, epitomized by a new group



Clockwise from top left: Summer picnics on the lawn at Tanglewood, in Lenox; Matt Rubiner at his namesake cheese shop in Great Barrington; eclectic modern décor at the Briarcliff Motel, in Great Barrington; Jeremy Stanton’s butcher shop in Great Barrington; stuffed squash blossoms with ricotta and peas at the Southfield Store, in Southfield; inside the Meat Market.

composed of both urban transplants and Berkshires natives, all of whom have made the conscious choice to live and promote a life of grounded, rural sophistication.

In the Berkshires—a craggy, hilly region stretching from western Massachusetts to the Connecticut border that is traversed by winding country roads and dotted with charming villages—you can find your way around by following the food. Matthew Rubiner, who opened Rubiner's Cheesemongers & Grocers in 2004 in a former bank on Main Street in Great Barrington, and followed it up with the popular Rubi's Café, was the first in the area to create a gleaming, high-end retail establishment. It prompted a friend who had wandered in when the shop first opened to call me, practically hyperventilating. "I feel as if I'm in Fauchon," she said, referring to that Parisian mecca of all things culinary. And indeed, Rubiner's is a gourmet's paradise, and Rubiner himself, the poet laureate of cheese. Some 125 artisanal cheeses are displayed with descriptions such as this one, for Azeitão: "Little drum of rich, dense, occasionally flowing raw ewe's milk cheese of the 'Serra (mountain)' style of southern Portugal. Sheepy and seductive." "We are in an era of extreme connoisseurship," Rubiner says. "The lay customer has incredible depth of knowledge. And there are a lot of cool, young, dynamic people who want to be butchers and cheesemongers. This probably extends across the landscape of artisanal food, to manufacturing and producing. Not just chefs are stars now."

THE BERKSHIRES' VARIED HISTORY CAN BE FELT IN THE STYLE OF THE PLACE, ITS HOMEGROWN, NEO-BOHEMIAN ATMOSPHERE.

The Berkshires have attracted precisely these young people—ones who might have gone into business or law or advertising in decades past but who, instead, are building lives close to the earth. Maybe it's a result of watching their own parents work too hard and not enjoy the fruits of their labors—but regardless, they have redefined success for themselves. Time with family and friends, homey pleasures: this isn't 1980's-style gluttony but something altogether different. This breed of Berkshire-ite is interested in learning and savoring, and in giving back. Each week at the community table at Rubi's Café, the local farmers—Stanton's brother Sean, who runs the Barber brothers' Blue Hill Farm in Great Barrington, among them—compare notes over breakfast about what's on the docket at the slaughterhouse and the price of vegetables. "Hay is a popular subject," Rubiner says. Erhard Wendt, who owns the Williamsville Inn, is known to be an expert forager. He (and he alone) knows where his ramps are, and Rubiner sells his ramp butter. Jeremy Stanton has staked out the best spots for morels, hosts classes in introductory and advanced sausage-making, pickling, and whole-hog breakdown, and sends recipes for cassoulet and milk-braised pork to his mailing list of 500. In one newsletter, he wrote: "We are here together because we collectively willed it to be so. Together we have put \$250,000 directly into the hands of local meat farmers and a corresponding amount of delicious food directly into our bellies." Mark Firth, whom Rubiner refers to as one of the "new old-school hipster butcher chefs," used to co-own highly successful restaurants in Brooklyn, including Marlow & Daughters. "I would go back and forth," he tells me, "between my farm up here and my restaurants down there, and I finally realized that I really didn't want to be raising animals here, then going back to the chaos." Firth decamped to the Berkshires with his wife and young children, and recently opened Bell & Anchor, a 60-seat locavore restaurant that he describes as "We raise it, we kill it, you eat it."

"I'm sick of the expression 'farm to table,'" Rubiner says. "I mean, what else is it supposed to be?" Following the food trail leads deep into the land and the complex web of people who take care of it. After a quick stop at the charming Southfield Store, a café/restaurant/bakery that sells favorites such as Shirl's gelato and work by local artists, he takes me down a dirt road to Rawson Brook Farm, where about 40 milking goats each yields six quarts of milk a day at the height of the season. "This is about as low-tech an operation there is," Rubiner says. Indeed, the goats are roaming, there isn't a soul to be seen, a refrigerator is full of the Monterey chèvre that the farm produces, and every so often someone stops by to buy some. But for a long time it was Stanton, the butcher, who delivered the fresh goat cheese all over the county each week, from the Old Mill, in

Stonover Farm, a B&B in Lenox.





Tomatoes at the Great Barrington Farmers' Market.

South Egremont, all the way to Meze, in Williamstown, easily driving a hundred miles. And he still gets around, despite running his thriving new business. Why? "For the same reason that I drive to Chatham, New York, twice a week to pick up my bread," Rubiner says, referring to the camaraderie among these merchants and restaurateurs. "I wouldn't survive without it."

Three hours from Manhattan and two and a half from Boston, "Great Barrington is not a suburb of anything," says cookbook writer, food blogger—and former town selectman—Alana Chernila, who works most Saturday mornings at the farmers' market selling produce for Indian Line Farm, one of the first community-supported agriculture farms in the country. "It will never be absorbed by a city. It never will become less of itself." Perhaps for this reason, the town and its environs easily inspire we could live here fantasies among visiting urbanites. It's just big enough to feel like it wouldn't get old fast, yet retains the small-town sense of knowing and being known. This fantasy—mine, I'll admit it—involves not only a refining of my palate, an ability to distinguish a ramp from a scallion, but also the wherewithal to whip up, as Chernila regularly does, granola from scratch (let alone know what to do with half a pig's head; when Chernila got one, she made headcheese).

The range of accommodations the Berkshires have to offer is striking. In April 2011, Richard and Clare Proctor, a British couple, began renovations on what had once been a typical roadside motel, the Briarcliff, at Monument Mountain, and transformed it into a spare, comfortable,

design-centric, and altogether cheerful—not to mention reasonably priced—spot. They're still working on the grounds. "Motels are where you go to get murdered, or go to have sex for a few hours in the afternoon," Clare says, referring to the pop-cultural preconceptions of such places, "but we were tired of B&B's. We'd stayed in lots of them and no longer felt compelled to talk with fifteen strangers at ten o'clock in the morning."

A B&B that would not fit the Proctors' scenario would be Stonover Farm—owned by Tom Werman, a former heavy-metal record producer who, along with his wife, Suky, has created a serene and airy property in Lenox, within walking distance of Tanglewood, complete with an art gallery and a one-room schoolhouse now used as a guest suite. And though modern, rural minimalism may be a hallmark of the new Berkshires, elegance and luxury abound at Wheatleigh, the elegant country-house hotel, and the heart, soul, and history of the region are on full display at the exquisite Blantyre, both also in Lenox. If I had a wealthy, eccentric, beloved great-aunt, this is where I'd want her to live. Owner Ann Fitzpatrick Brown has created an environment so warm and cossetting that, staying there, I was overcome by a hazy, delightful sense of relaxation, like a puppy finding a spot on a rug in the sunlight. There were books and magazines to satisfy every taste and whim, from Dickens to *Hello!* In the 1902 manse's great hall, the staff posts suggestions for the day's activities: Playing a game of chess in the music room. Relaxing in the sauna in the Potting Shed. Taking a walk on the Blantyre trail. Embarking on a guided tour of the extraordinary wine cellar with Luc Chevalier, the elegant maitre d' and former sommelier who moved to Blantyre from his longtime position at New York's Lutèce. The house is full of such treasures—the regal heads of a Canadian caribou named Bob and an elk called James; portraits of "the girls," Brown's late, beloved wheaten terriers, dressed in full Elizabethan garb; a portrait of a "Hoover granddaughter" leading a lamb. Brown, whose family has owned Blantyre for 32 years, is a curator of a certain magical, all-but-bygone era, and her passion is in preserving it. "One of the reasons people come back is that it's always the same," she tells me. "Once, we had a problem in the Paterson Suite with the frog stopper in the bathtub. A guest came back after years and asked, 'What happened to the frog?'"

As tempting as it is to sink into the nurturing environment of Blantyre and never leave, just over in Stockbridge is the yin to Blantyre's yang: an unlikely, institutional-looking, massive brick building perched high above the Stockbridge Bowl lake, the Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health—where an entirely different kind of

For more ideas about easy summer travel, log on travelandleisure.com/weekend-getaways.

ALL-SUITE Seclusion



Unwind among the golden sands and sapphire waters of Conejos Bay in romantic all-adult, all-oceanfront suites. Eight gourmet restaurants, swim-out suites, nearby golfing, eco-tours and more.

SecretsResorts.com


SECRETS
Huatulco
RESORT & SPA



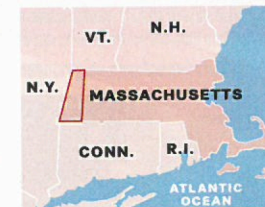
amresorts

©2013

nurturing takes place. As is true of most things Berkshire, Kripalu is authentic, complex, quirky, storied, and unlike anyplace else. Its appeal is not flashy or immediately apparent. It takes time to discover the beauty of guided morning kayaking on the Stockbridge Bowl, or the range of programs, from the most out-there (Soul-Level Animal Communication: What Our Animals Are Really Telling Us) to the seriously cutting-edge (Stephen Cope's Institute for Extraordinary Living, which is engaged in a Department of Defense-funded study of yoga's effects on military personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder). One evening, I booked an after-dinner ayurvedic treatment called *shirodhara* in the spartan Healing Arts Center. An oil was chosen specifically for my *dosha*, or bodily humor. Anxious? Ungrounded? Restless? Fearful? Irritated by loud noise? Chilled or cold? Check, check, check. In a small, quiet room, a practitioner named Nikki draped me

in towels, then began to pour a slow, steady stream of warm oil onto the center of my forehead, my "third eye." Music—meditative chants—filled the air, repeating, repeating. The sensation, at first, was almost unbearable. But then something within me began to break down, to relax. After an hour in which I lost all sense of time, having stopped wondering how I'd ever wash the oil out of my hair, and smelling not-unpleasantly of sesame, I drifted back toward my monastic room, feeling a rare and profound sense of peace. I stopped in front of a plaque engraved with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi. It seemed to encapsulate everything there is to say about life in the Berkshires and its valiant anthem to living an authentic, grounded life: "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." I think the butchers, the cheesemongers, the farmers, and the artists and artisans who make up today's Berkshires would agree. +

The Berkshires



T+L Guide

STAY

Blantyre 16 Blantyre Rd., Lenox; blantyre.com. \$\$\$\$
Briarcliff Motel 506 Stockbridge Rd., Great Barrington; thebriarcliffmotel.com. \$
Stonover Farm 169 Undermountain Rd., Lenox; stonoverfarm.com. \$\$\$
Wheatleigh 11 Hawthorne Rd., Lenox; wheatleigh.com. \$\$\$\$
Williamsville Inn 286 Great Barrington Rd.,

West Stockbridge; williamsvilleinn.com. \$\$

EAT

Bell & Anchor 178 Main St., Great Barrington; 413/528-5050. \$\$
Dream Away Lodge 1342 County Rd., Becket; thedreamawaylodge.com. \$\$\$
Rubi's Café 264 Main St., Great Barrington; rubins.com. \$

DO

Indian Line Farm 57 Jug End Rd., South Egremont; indianlinefarm.com.
Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival 358 George Carter Rd., Becket; jacobspillow.org.
Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health 57 Interlaken Rd., Stockbridge; kripalu.org.
MASS MoCA 87 Marshall

St., North Adams; massmoca.org.

Rawson Brook Farm 185 New Marlboro Rd., Monterey; 413/528-2138.
Tanglewood 297 West St., Lenox; tanglewood.org.
Williamstown Theatre Festival 1000 Main St., Williamstown; wtfestival.org.

SHOP

Meat Market 389 Stockbridge Rd., Great Barrington; themeatmarketgb.com.
Rubiner's Cheesemongers & Grocers 264 Main St., Great Barrington; rubins.com.
Southfield Store 163 Norfolk Rd., Southfield; southfieldstore.com.

HOTELS \$ Less than \$200 \$\$ \$200 to \$350 \$\$\$ \$350 to \$500 \$\$\$\$ \$500 to \$1,000
\$ More than \$1,000
RESTAURANTS \$ Less than \$25 \$\$ \$25 to \$75 \$\$\$ \$75 to \$150 \$\$\$\$ More than \$150