

HUFFPOST TRAVEL

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6 Must-sees in Bucks County, Pa.

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Averting the crowded apple orchards and bumpy hay rides of autumn, I opted for a high-end weekend in Bucks County. This quaint corner of Pennsylvania is the very definition of the "country" to the proverbial "town," where New Yorkers, Philadelphians and others have come to escape their hectic workaday lives for over a century.

After my own frenzied day in Manhattan, Friday night found me in Holicong, Pa., for a luxurious stay in the 1740 Manor House at the [Inn at Barley Sheaf Farm](#), former home of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright George Kaufman. Each suite in the Manor House is named after one of his works. Mine was "Dancing in the Dark" (an homage to his 1949 film), perched on the third floor featuring two bathrooms with Frette towels and Bvlgari toiletries, a bedroom with luxurious European down bedding and a sitting room with a fireplace, two chaise lounges and a large jacuzzi tub.



On the 100-acre property, Kaufman entertained illustrious friends, including the Marx brothers, Moss Hart and John Steinbeck. (One story goes that Kaufman helped him perfect *Of Mice and Men* at Barley Sheaf.) "Barley Sheaf was the original B&B in Bucks County," explains owner Christine Figueroa, who purchased the estate in 2004. "We wanted

to create a boutique, European hotel experience" after spending time in Sweden and Brussels.

Across the river in Huntington County, N.J., is the charming [Chestnut Hill on the Delaware](#)<, which Rob and Linda Castagna opened in 1982. Like Figueroa, they were influenced by European stays to open a B&B of their own. "We were on a three week vacation to the British Isles, and by the third or fourth day we discovered bed and breakfasts," Linda recalls. Returning stateside, they opened Chestnut Hill. "I had never made a pot of coffee in my whole life. My friends were going to buy me a 16-slot toaster and a year's supply of Pop Tarts," she chuckles. "This morning, I made a big puff with minced meat, fresh apples and a tapioca-cider sauce. So it's different now." Indeed.

The house was built in 1860 and the parlor, drawing room, and dining room maintain the sense of a gentler era along this quiet river. You're unlikely to find as affable and warm a hostess -- with seasonally appropriate hot apple cider waiting, personalized notes for guests and even homemade gingerbread men on the nightstands. "I have a deep love of people. Everyone I've ever met has a story, and what a joy it is to know that."



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Michel and Barbara Faure oversaw [The Golden Pheasant Inn and Restaurant](#) for 20 years before passing the torch to their three daughters Briar Faure Mewbourne, Brittany Faure Booz and Blake Faure. At Le Cordon Bleu in California, Blake studied basic principles like making stocks, sauces, soups and charcuterie, "which is kind of a dying art," she laments. "It's easier for most chefs to bring those things in." Under her and her husband's direction, the kitchen increased its local haul by 30 percent.



Chef Blake in the garden. (c)The Golden Pheasant Inn.

The restaurant at the inn has been a high point of Bucks County's restaurant scene for two decades and it continues to be. Nestled in a picturesque corner between the Delaware River and the canal, one can enjoy a Sunday brunch of poached Scottish salmon with an Herbes de Provence infused tomato sauce, a perfectly-spiced Bloody Mary, fresh Blue Point oysters, butternut squash soup or challah bread infused with Grand Marnier batter.

What's top-notch food without wine? Jerry Forrest has owned the [Buckingham Valley Vineyards](#) since 1966. His 45 acres of vineyards were among the first in Pennsylvania, thanks to the state's Farm Winery Act of 1968, which permitted wineries to sell directly to the public if it was made from Pennsylvania-grown fruit. He and his former business partner started with no budgets, no quotas and still have "virtually no staff" -- just family and friends. Today, it's the only winery in the county that makes sparkling wine because, as Forrest deadpans, "I like to drink it."



Photo (c) Erik Forsberg

Home to many writers, painters and playwrights, Bucks County has also been the residence of sculptor Steven Snyder for 47 years. In the quiet country woods of Point Pleasant, Pa., visitors wander under a fragrant forest of cedar trees through his expansive collection of sculptures at the singular [Steven Snyder Cedar Maze](#). Pieces range from abstract arrangements of stone to representational objects like birds, angels and turtles -- even a train on a track.



Photo (c)Pinky Snyder

Bucks County lies on a bed of limestone and Snyder uses that and other rocks from the Delaware River including shale, diabase (a subvolcanic rock) and argillite to make his sculptures. In a [short film by Elijah Lee Rider](#), Snyder explains, "If you're lucky enough to find a path, and it feels right to you, that that must be the divine thing to do -- to continue on that path and try to create good."

In Doylestown, visitors find the more formalized art of the [Michener Art Museum](#). The current exhibition, "From Philadelphia to Monaco: Grace Kelly Beyond the Icon," displays dozens of the princess's dresses by Dior, Hermès, YSL, her Best Actress Academy Award statue for *The Country Girl* and an array of hand-written notes from Alfred Hitchcock, Cary Grant, and other collaborators and admirers. The exhibition, running through January, traces Kelly's life from a Philadelphia girl to a Hollywood starlet to the Princess of Monaco.



For those less dazzled by an individual's good genes and luck, the museum offers the permanent collections of Pennsylvania Impressionist painters in "The Bucks County Landscape" as well as the contemplative Nakashima Reading Room, an installation of classic furniture from the studio of the area's own internationally-known woodworker, George Nakashima.

Since its European "founding" in 1681, Bucks County has been a draw for those seeking quiet contemplation among nature. With Thanksgiving on the horizon and winter just beyond that, there's no better time to revel in the colors, tastes, and passionate people of this special spot in the Northeast.