



INNS

## High Hampton's Renewed Mountain Magic

The Blackberry Farm team helps usher in the next chapter of a fabled North Carolina mountain retreat

By **ELIZABETH HUTCHISON HICKLIN**

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PHOTO: TIM ROBISON

The High Hampton inn's front desk; trout with benne seeds from the Dining Room; the Lake Cottage.

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change. The getaway served as a time capsule in the heart of the Blue Ridge in Cashiers, North Carolina, where days consisted of morning waterfall hikes and lazy afternoons spent fishing and swimming in the property's fifteen-acre lake, ringed in banks of pale pink mountain laurel. Evenings hummed with Scrabble tournaments and bingo. It was a place where guests still dressed for dinner, and air-conditioning amounted to a few windows thrown open to catch mountain breezes. Wi-Fi, when it was introduced, was spotty at best, and until six years ago, guests could only make reservations by telephone.

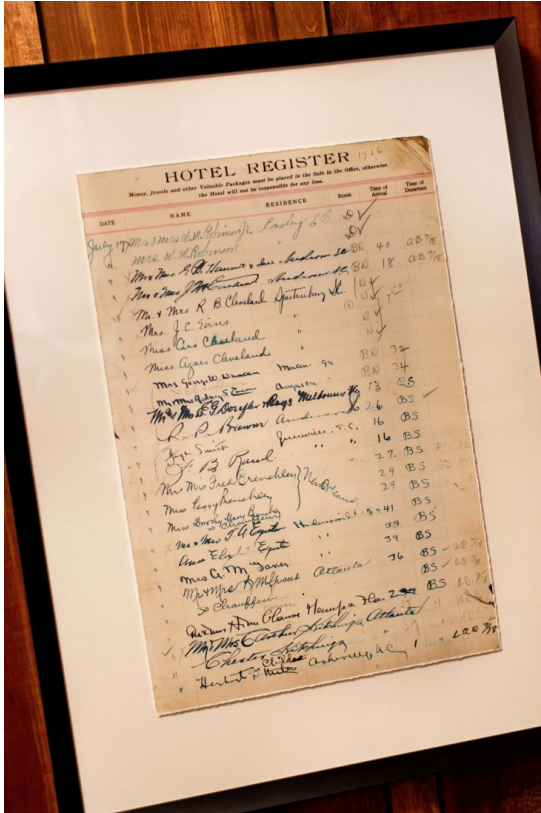


PHOTO: TIM ROBISON

An old hotel register framed in the hallway.

In the late 1800s, Caroline Hampton Halsted and her husband, William Stewart Halsted, one of the founding surgeons at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, purchased the then 450-acre Western North Carolina property and its historic hunting lodge from her aunts, naming it High Hampton. A North Carolina couple, E. L. McKee and his wife, Gertrude, converted it to an inn in the early 1920s, and for nearly a century the McKee family welcomed vacationers seeking relaxation and refuge from the South's sweltering summers. Today the unique resort and club, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, sits on more than 1,400 pristine acres of Appalachian countryside near the Nantahala National Forest.



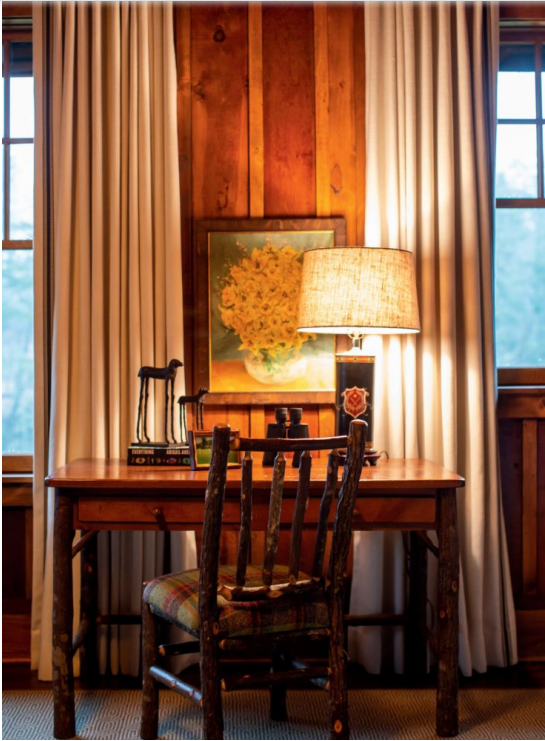


PHOTO: TIM ROBINSON

Each guest room features its own art.

Change finally caught up with High Hampton in 2017, when a trio of family-run Southern companies, all with ties to the area, purchased the retro resort and its aging inn. But not too much change. They sought to preserve the spirit of the place while making thoughtful updates that would ensure another hundred years of memories. One of its new owners, Sandy Beall, a cofounder of Tennessee's [Blackberry Farm](#) and [Blackberry Mountain](#), first visited the storied property with his family in 1982. He had tried to buy the inn once before, but the McKee descendants declined and instead charmed him into purchasing a private home in one of the resort's residential communities. Beall and the Blackberry team brought their decades of hospitality expertise to the revamped inn and its two restaurants, which began welcoming guests again in 2021 after nearly three years of renovations.



PHOTO: TIM ROBINSON

Pizza with North Carolina's Lady Edison ham; beverage manager Kelsey Hofmann.

"High Hampton was cherished by the McKee family for so long that we all really want to do what's right for the property," says Scott Greene, the inn's new general manager. "There are parts that simply can't be reproduced." Plenty will look familiar to longtime visitors. Though weather



Inside, the American chestnut walls and ceilings, the color of bourbon, remain unchanged, as does the lobby's massive four-sided stone fireplace. One significant addition: central heating and air, which will allow the resort to stay open year-round for the first time in its nearly hundred-year history.



PHOTO: TIM ROBISON

The inn sits on more than 1,400 acres.

Working closely with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, the Blackberry Farm Design team updated and enlarged the twelve guest rooms in the main inn and the forty-seven others in the surrounding cottages. They kept much of the original furniture, a mix of antiques and vintage pieces, refurbishing it with fresh paint or new upholstery. Colorful textiles, contemporary lighting, and artwork rooted in history—framed pages from High Hampton's original guest book, for example—now line the hallways, which still evoke a beloved family home. Returning guests might recognize the resort's old wooden dining chairs repurposed as catchalls for towels and toiletries in the bathrooms, and the third floor's odd-shaped angular doors as funky new coffee tables. They'll also be happy to note that the rooms remain television-free.

At the back of the inn, High Hampton's two restaurants expanded the outdoor dining spaces to take better advantage of the views of Hampton Lake and Rock Mountain, which turns a brilliant rose gold as the sun sets. Open for lunch, snacks, and cocktails (including Bloody Marys on Sundays), [the Tavern](#) is laid-back, serving elevated comfort food like Providence Farm beef tartare with black pepper potato chips. The upstairs [Dining Room](#) no longer requires coat and tie, but jackets *are* recommended for dinner. Instead of the long-running buffet, a talented pair of Blackberry alums—executive p.m. chef Scott Franqueza and his wife, pastry chef April Franqueza—now oversee an à la carte Blue Ridge-inspired menu, relying on a network of local purveyors for dishes such as benne-cruste trout.



PHOTO: TIM ROBISON

Chefs Zach Chancey and April and Scott Franqueza.

Beyond the inn, life at High Hampton remains centered around the outdoors. July through early fall, colorful blooms the size of your hand brighten up the heirloom Dahlia Garden, where gardener Drew English tends some six hundred of the mountain-air-loving plants. The towering ginkgo, bottlebrush, bald cypress, copper beech, and Fraser fir trees planted by Dr. Halsted and later Gertrude McKee still greet visitors along the main drive and manicured front lawn. Maples, sourwoods, yellow poplars, and rare red spruces shade High Hampton's fifteen miles of hiking trails, which include challenging routes to the summits of Rock Mountain and Chimneytop and come summer are shot through with bright pink ribbons of blooming rhododendron.





PHOTO: TIM ROBISON

Mountain-air-loving dahlias.

Across the lawn, toward the remodeled club, you'll find tennis, pickleball, and croquet courts as well as a new Tom Fazio-designed golf course, which recently opened to club members and inn guests. "[Fazio] fell in love with the area when he built the Wade Hampton course in 1987," says Tony Snoey, the club's general manager. "He said he'd been designing this course in his head for thirty years." And while there's no *need* to venture off property for a hike, High Hampton makes a fine base camp for exploring farther afield, like the short trek to the postcard-worthy swimming hole at Silver Run Falls. The inn is also minutes from some of the best fly fishing in the country, and the concierge can set you up with a guide from [Brookings Anglers](#).



PHOTO: TIM ROBISON

Enjoying an afternoon on the lake.



Doing absolutely nothing is also fully endorsed. Exhibit A: the six-room spa carved out of the inn's third floor, with gabled natural wood walls, or the new lakeside pool. Scott Greene admits that the laziest days at High Hampton are often the most memorable—even the rainy ones. (Cashiers lies in the middle of a temperate rain forest and gets upwards of eighty inches per year.) Instead of spoiling the day, afternoon showers force an even slower pace. The

There's no better way to doze off than to the sounds of an Appalachian rainstorm. "Slowing down and just being together, taking a moment with extended family and friends," Greene says, "that's something we all need a little more of right now."



PHOTO: TIM ROBINSON

A guest bath at the inn; a renovated room.



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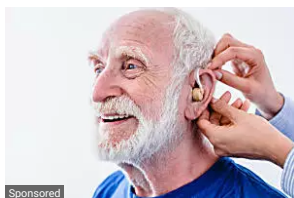
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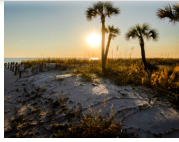
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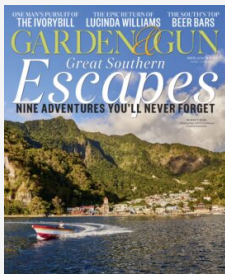
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