

QUICK TRIPS

OLD SOUL,
NEW STAY

GARDINER HOUSE BRINGS FRESH ELEGANCE AND TRUE LOCAL SPIRIT TO NEWPORT

BY MARY MURRAY



MICHAEL P. H. CLIFFORD

Rhode Island has a monopoly on summer. From the Vanderbilts of the Gilded Age to modern-day celebrities like Jay Leno and Judge Judy, well-to-do Americans have long flocked to their Newport “cottages” when temperatures rise, trading haunting humidity and city life for ocean breezes and languid days. It’s only fitting that Gardiner House, a new boutique hotel overlooking Newport Harbor, has a history steeped in high society.

The hotel is owned by Newporters Wirt Blaffer and Howard Cushing, the great-grandson of American artist Howard Gardiner Cushing. Named in his honor, Gardiner House draws deeply from Gardiner Cushing’s life, art, and nearby home, The Ledges, built in 1867. The best example of this is the custom wallpaper by Twenty2 Wallpaper that hugs



NICK MELE



SHANNON HAMMOND

NEWPORT’S GARDINER HOUSE EMBRACES ITS HARBORSIDE LOCATION, WITH WATER VIEWS AVAILABLE ACROSS THE PROPERTY, INCLUDING IN THE SUN ROOM (FAR LEFT). THE TWO-STORY WALLPAPER THAT WRAPS THE HOTEL’S CENTRAL STAIRCASE IS A REIMAGINATION OF AN ORIGINAL MURAL BY THE HOTEL’S NAMESAKE, ARTIST HOWARD GARDINER CUSHING.

the central staircase and is a reinterpretation of a circa-1905 mural by Gardiner Cushing.

This whimsical wallpaper establishes a watercolor-esque palette of refined blues, greens, coral, and lilac that continues across the hotel’s 21 rooms and suites. Guests unlock their sanctuaries using a real key (an enchanting ode to Newport visitors from generations past) and are greeted by furnishings that exude quiet luxury. Think: rattan

accents, inviting chairs with gentle curves, Matouk linens, and playful prints across pillows and the like. The same vibe permeates the Sun Room, which flirts with modernity but leans decidedly Gilded Age. Relax here with a good book and a cup of tea, and it’s easy to imagine the year is 1895.

Since opening in late 2023, Gardiner House has woven itself into the fabric of Newport, a tight-knit community of 25,000 residents that



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ABOVE AND RIGHT: AT FLORA, PEEK AT A PORTRAIT OF FLORA PAYNE WHITNEY AND DINE ON CUISINE THAT MERGES THE BEST OF THE MED AND NEW ENGLAND. BELOW: THE STUDIO BAR BOASTS A GOLDEN CEILING AND EMERALD WALLS. BOTTOM RIGHT: WHILE EACH ROOM IS UNIQUE, THEY ALL FEATURE TEXTURES AND TONES INSPIRED BY THE COAST.



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welcomes some 4 million visitors annually. While its charming interiors—designed by New York-based Space Exploration and rich in references to Old Newport—have garnered national attention, Blaffer and Cushing’s overall goal was to create a destination very much of, by, and for Newport.

They started with the location. Nestled just off the city’s oldest street, Gardiner House sits on Lees Wharf at the former site of the William & Manchester Shipyard; it’s a short walk from all the activity of downtown Newport and a quick drive to the famed Cliff Walk and Gilded Age mansions. Realized with help from Newport architecture firm Herk Works, the new-build house channels a seaside home, characterized by sweeping

waterfront views and an effortless flow from one gathering space to the next.

One such space is the Studio Bar, a sultry hangout where guests and locals alike can sip cocktails at the fluted bar or snuggle up in front of the fireplace (a Newport necessity no matter the season). With its eclectic mix of leather and velvet furnishings, the Studio Bar feels like your grandfather’s study, in the best way. The cocktail menu,

however, is fully contemporary. Opt for The Gardiner—a punchy blend of Tito’s Vodka, rose hip tea, Prosecco, and lemon—and thank us later.

After drinks, head to the second floor to dine at Flora. Before you open your menu, turn your attention to the portrait behind the bar. It is of the restaurant’s namesake, Flora Payne Whitney, and a re-creation of a 1905 painting Gardiner Cushing made at the request of Flora’s mother, American sculptor and heiress Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. (Today, you can tour the room in which young Gertrude slept at The Breakers.)

Beyond this artistic element, the name “Flora” embodies the culinary ethos at the center of this coastal Mediterranean restau-

rant. Chef de cuisine Miguel Somoza draws inspiration from his childhood foraging for ingredients in the Spanish countryside to craft gorgeous dishes that at once taste of the Mediterranean and celebrate Rhode Island’s regional ingredients. A highlight from a recent meal was the local yellowfin tuna crudo dressed in a lemon vinaigrette and dotted with capers, chili flakes, olive oil, and Maldon salt. Don’t leave without savoring one of the house-made pastas.

When reserving your seat at Flora, request a window table fronting the harbor and time your meal to coincide with the sunset. As the sky transforms from tranquil blue to electric shades of sherbet, you’ll feel suspended in time and part of Newport both past and present. (gardinerhouse.com) ◀◀



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