

## **Kenwood Inn & Spa**

by Danielle Machotka

Escape was immediate. In the time it took us to go from the parking lot to the courtyard of the Kenwood Inn & Spa, we traveled from the Sonoma Valley to Italy and were instantly caught up in the fantasy of having arrived at a villa in a hill town in Umbria.

We were frazzled when we pulled into the Kenwood Inn & Spa, exhausted in the way every professional, parent or combination of the two is these days--too much to do, not enough time, and a sense of rarely doing any of it terribly well. My companion and I arrived with massages scheduled and total escape on our minds.

The inn sits against a small hill, near the town of Kenwood, surrounded by wineries, vineyards, and state and regional parks. Whether you arrive from the north or south, the rhythms and textures of the Sonoma Valley's wine-region landscape soothe you into a pleasantly anticipatory state of mind. It was all we could do not to race each other into the welcoming Naples yellow stucco building, half hidden with unruly vines climbing every available surface. If I were a vine, I'd want to live here.

We stayed overnight at the inn, though it is not the only way to experience the escape of Kenwood. You can schedule a remarkable day's getaway just at the spa. Enjoying the massages and facials is not contingent upon having a room reservation, and spa patrons are invited to enjoy all the inn's amenities for the day. Day facilities at Kenwood include a pool and jacuzzi, a steam room, and a first-rate restaurant. The pool and jacuzzi are the centerpiece of a lush, colorful Mediterranean/English garden which grows exuberantly, barely revealing the charming facades of the inn's 12 suites. The inn and spa buildings

surround the courtyard, shutting off the outside world. As your cares vaporize in the hot Sonoma sun, it is not hard to imagine that you are a wealthy Umbrian enjoying your villa garden with a few visitors.

Owners Terry and Roseann Grimm built the Kenwood Inn & Spa almost eight years ago, initially offering four rooms. They expanded to the current 12 suites after continually turning clients away because they were fully booked. Terry's design for the buildings and garden was inspired by the architecture of Umbria, in central Italy, with its rustic nature and attention to craftsmanship. He brought back samples of building materials and colors, which he used to influence the design of the inn and spa. The buildings are one and two stories, with generous multi-paned windows. What is visible of the walls reveals stucco in a soft shade of yellow. Arbors and balconies host a profusion of flowering vines, and an entire wall of the garden is devoted to roses of all colors and sizes. A large olive tree gracefully drapes over the dining terrace. And those olives set out as snacks? The Grimms harvest them from this tree and two others on the property, and cure them for the guests.

Roseann designed the interiors for the suites, which are airy and intimate. They feel like rooms in a home, with earthtones dominating the color scheme and comfort the operative word. The furniture is extremely inviting; the sofa beckoned me and a good book from the moment I walked in. French doors open onto a terrace with more chairs and a table, and shuttered windows allow as much privacy or visibility as guests desire. Those who are disinclined to lie by the pool will find the rooms an appealing sanctuary.

A bottle of wine, a jar of amaretto cookies and a bouquet of fresh flowers all cleverly placed in front of the fireplace welcome guests and encourage R&R. On warm evenings, the upstairs rooms' balconies offer an enchanting alternative to the fireplace. They are generous in size, with arches and an awning giving a sense of enclosure and privacy. The prolific vines

and large trees in the courtyard and on the balconies partially obscure views both in and out. Your sense of place is left completely to your imagination. We sat on our balcony sipping the wine, listening to the music coming from who-knows-where and the laughter of diners on the courtyard terrace, and easily pictured ourselves in a village in Italy.

When I opened my eyes the next morning, I couldn't shake that impression. My efforts to imagine myself in the middle of the Sonoma Valley were in vain; as I looked around the room and heard people stirring in the courtyard, I was sure I would walk out into the main square of Montone and have breakfast in the cafe across from the church. My only concern was to remember to order a *decaffeinated* espresso.

The Grimms have subtly achieved their goal of making guests feel they are visiting a good friend's home (albeit a good friend in Europe). The kitchen, a marvelous country affair with plenty of copper cookware and a friendly staff, is open to a room where you can get coffee or tea all day. Unobtrusive waiters serve breakfast on the restaurant terrace, welcoming the day with fruit and yogurt plates and offering fresh-squeezed orange juice. The illusion of visiting a friend is heightened by the service throughout the inn, which is understated and efficient. Chairs and reading material offer repose in all settings--indoors, outdoors under vine-covered arbors, and outdoors in full sun. Thirsty guests can reach into the well-stocked refrigerator in the sitting room, and if their needs require staff assistance, it is prompt and friendly without fawning.

After breakfast, we began our spa day with a massage in the cool rooms on one side of the courtyard. Kenwood offers a full range of therapeutic massages, facials and spa body treatments, and there is a manicurist on staff. We had separate massages, though Togetherness Massages are offered in your suite if you are a guest at the inn. Fully rubbed and stretched, we met in the courtyard. The look on my companion's face was eerily

unrecognizable; the massage must have been a success. I was amazed that a stay in an Italian villa, a simple muscle manipulation and the promise of a day by the pool could turn him from a stressed, fatigued professional into an unwound and perky human being. We reclined in the lounge chairs, relishing our newfound life of leisure. The warm sun kept our muscles from bouncing back into their office configuration, and when it got too hot we rolled into the pool and floated on mats, holding hands like teenagers.

Lunch time was the most strenuous part of our day. To reach the restaurant, we had to walk back up to its terrace, a healthy 30 feet from our lounge chairs. The lunch menu is *prix fixe* and changes daily. Both our main courses were excellent: one, a focaccia with fresh tomatoes and herbs, and the other, grilled salmon served with mango salsa on a bed of mixed greens. A glass of wine was all we needed to develop amnesia about the rest of our lives; our universe had shrunk to the space inside these vine-covered walls.

Suitably nourished, we retired again to the central courtyard, where more sunbathing and dips in the pool restored us completely. We read magazines, chatted and dozed, struck by the luxury of such simple pleasures.

Eventually the sun moved behind the hill, signaling the onset of evening. We reluctantly folded up our towels and packed away our sunscreen. Our pace as we strolled back to the car hardly resembled the speed with which we move during the work week; after a night and day of such high-intensity relaxation, it was difficult to imagine merging back into the fast lane. With thoughts of Italy still fresh in our minds, however, we pictured ourselves on the Autostrada and accelerated.