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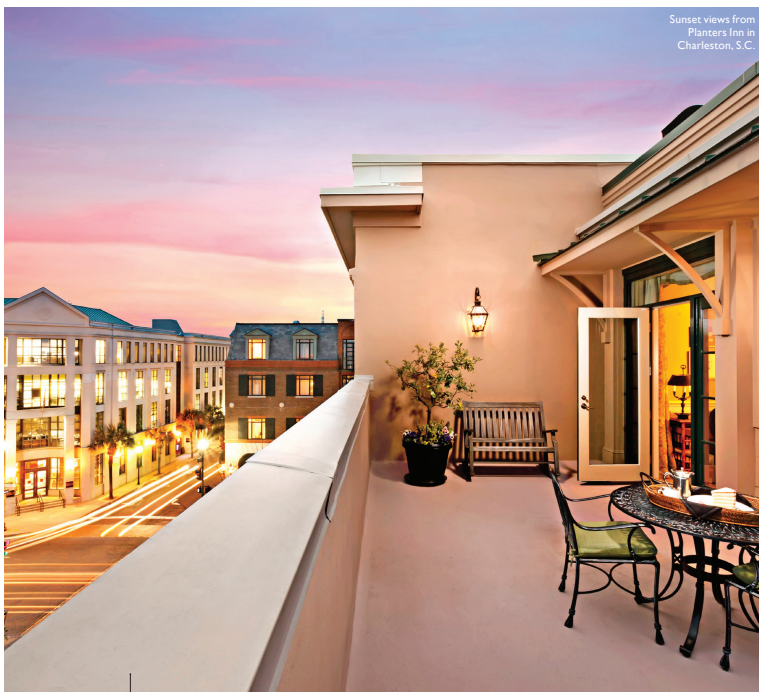
CHANDLER PHOTO COURTESY OF RESTORATION HARDWARE; TAVERNA DISH PHOTO BY BLACK BOX INK



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TRAVEL & RECREATION

weekender



THE ART OF GRACIOUS LIVING

Here's how to get Relais & Châteaux's international excellence right here in the Southeast.

By Lauren Finney

What do Eden Rock in St. Bart's; The Little Nell in Aspen, Colo.; and Il San Pietro di Positano in Positano, Italy, all have in common? They're all gorgeous, individually owned properties that are heavy on the sustainability and culinary expertise. But what unites them is their **Relais & Châteaux** (relaischateaux.com) association. Over 550 landmark hotels and restaurants worldwide bear the distinctive plaque of the nonprofit association since its inception in 1954, signaling an authentic and intimate travel experience that demonstrates the company's commitment to what its team calls a "passion for place." Here are five Southeastern properties of the utmost distinction, where Southern hospitality is brought to the next level.

PLANTERS INN

WHAT TO EXPECT A 64-room gem in downtown Charleston, S.C., **Planters Inn's** (suites from \$349 per night, plantersinn.com) building dates to the mid-1800s. Designer Amelia T. Handegan has preserved the history of the property, which includes working fireplaces; heart pine floors; and antiques, including a four-poster bed in each room and exclusive furniture from the Historic Charleston collection at Baker.

WHAT TO EAT The Peninsula Grill is a must-do on any Charleston visitor's list. The famous 12-layer Ultimate Coconut Cake is reason enough to dine in (although you can order it for room service), but there are also classic low-country options such as oysters, pan-seared Sunburst Trout Farms trout and local field pea succotash. Everything has been considered, from afternoon mango tea and cheese crisps to macarons at turndown. If you get inspired to cook for yourself, Planters Inn is also home to the world's first Le Creuset concept store.



THE FEARRINGTON HOUSE INN

WHAT TO EXPECT More than just an accommodation, North Carolina's **The Fearrington House Inn** (suites from \$350 per night, fearrington.com) is the anchor for an entire community. It's a place to escape, with everything from cows and goats to "one wayward donkey," as they cheekily tout, around the pastoral property. If you like it, you can stay: There's a realty office that caters to the village, which 2,000 people call home.

WHAT TO EAT The Fearrington House Restaurant is the only restaurant in North Carolina with chefs awarded Relais & Châteaux Grand Chefs, churning out unique seasonal dishes with local ingredients. Be prepared to be surprised: Items like a 62-degree egg with smoked hollandaise or green goddess risotto with avocado and Scamorza might appear.



Locavores will thrive at Blackberry Farm.

BLACKBERRY FARM

WHAT TO EXPECT The hotel's 4,200 acres in the Great Smoky Mountains offer a wonderful respite from modern times. Activities include Orvis fly-fishing, horseback riding, archery, a Farmstead Field School and more. Be sure to stop to take a look at the nearby brewery and the truffle dogs raised on property (there are waiting lists longer for the Lagotto Romagnolo puppies than those for private schools in Manhattan).

WHAT TO EAT Dining is the main event at **Blackberry Farm** (cottage suites from \$1,900 per night, blackberryfarm.com). There is an enormous emphasis on the education of their guests in relationship to the food that is eaten on property. Cooking demonstrations and farm talks supplement dining at The Barn at Blackberry Farm (with James Beard Award-winning chefs) and The Dogwood. Blackberry Farm is one of the 160 Relais & Châteaux properties worldwide with a working sustainable garden, and one of only 65 that has a bee program.

OLD EDWARDS INN AND SPA

WHAT TO EXPECT You know it; you love it; you visit often—**Old Edwards Inn and Spa** (suites from \$410 per night, oldedwardsinn.com) has been the Blue Ridge Mountains gold standard for Atlantans looking for a quick getaway. A European feel extends from the Highlands, N.C., community outward to the resort, with everything from spa features to golf at the private Old Edwards Club. Casual elegance is the name of the game, and service is, of course, a top priority.

WHAT TO EAT Seven dining and drinking options await you, including Madison's (request the wine cellar for a unique experience) and The Grill Room at Old Edwards Club, serving up modern Southern cuisine. Executive chef Chris Huerta makes good use of Madison's Organic Kitchen Garden at The Farm at Old Edwards, which he co-founded in 2011.

WESTGLOW RESORT & SPA

WHAT TO EXPECT

Westglow Resort & Spa (resort packages from \$425 per night, westglowresortandspa.com) is the former summer home of writer and artist Elliott Daingerfield. Located in Blowing Rock, N.C., the spa resort takes wellness and service seriously, with a 4-to-1 staff-to-guest ratio for the nine rooms and two lodges available. Guests enjoy everything from metabolic-rate assessments and goal setting to weight management and life coaching. Sweeping views of the mountains greet you from the inside of the Life Enrichment Center (aka the spa).

WHAT TO EAT There's a dedicated spa menu that feels indulgent, with dishes like grilled Ora King salmon with vegetables and forbidden rice, and a dark chocolate and red wine flourless torte.



Westglow Resort & Spa is on the National Register of Historic Places.



Mountain views add to the charm of Old Edwards Inn and Spa.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RELAIS & CHATEAUX