

Travel

Elegant inn is *inviting coastal destination*

Near the crossroads cluster of Lincolnville Center is a delightful restaurant providing the chance for a special dinner. The Youngtown Inn serves excellent French food in a romantic and refreshing setting. In addition, as the name implies, they are a bed and breakfast inn offering a quiet, relaxed stay just minutes from the bustle of Camden.

The menu is authentic. The chef, Manuel Mercier, is French and studies cooking in Paris. He and his wife Mary Ann are also the owners. Together, they have made this 1810 Federal farmhouse into an inviting destination.

The inn is located at the juncture of Route 52 and the Youngtown Road, at the top end of Megunticook Lake. Entering through a side portico, you will find a tiny, charming bar to your right. The main dining room is to the left, and the minute you enter, you know this will be a special evening.

Nine or ten tables offer a seating choice by large front windows or near a small wood stove, which gave off a

Sunday Ride Carole Vincent



welcome warmth on a recent cool evenings. Tables have white cloths, small lamps and fresh flowers. The hardwood floors give a mellow glow, white-painted walls are backdrop for a pretty floral stenciling, and window treatments are classy and simple. The effect is elegant but comfortable. To one side of the dining room is a glassed-in porch, full of light and inviting in warm weather.

Service is unobtrusively and impeccably given by a pleasant young man who offers crusty hot rolls and ice water immediately. You are relaxed before you open the menu.

Appetizers range from duck pate to Maine crab cakes to French onion soup. Entrees include several pasta dishes, such as lobster, scallops and sun-dried tomatoes in a white sauce over fettuccini, an excellent special that evening.

There is loin of veal with wild mushrooms and cognac sauce, rack of lamb and two steaks. Seafood takes a large portion of the menu, including scallops in puff pastry with pernod and cream sauce, lobster, and a wonderful salmon filet with a thin potato crust, served with a light herb and lemon sauce. Accompaniments this night were baby carrots, spinach fettuccini and sauteed cauliflower.

Dessert here is a must, and Mercier's signature piece cannot be too highly recommended; his creme brulee is unbelievable. This rich, soft vanilla custard is served at room temperature in a flat oval dish, covered with a thin crust of caramelized sugar. The combination of tastes and textures as it melts in your mouth is worth the visit in itself.

There are other options, of course; a chocolate terrine



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The dining porch at Youngtown Inn at Lincolnville Center, decorated for a wedding.

that sounded worth another trip, several homemade fruit sorbets, a cappuccino mousse cake. Espresso is available, to help counteract the richness of your dessert choice. Entrees range in price from \$12 to \$19 (for filet mignon), making this a bargain for a dining experience of this caliber.

If you wish to spend the night, you can ascend the center staircase to one of six rooms. All have private baths and are simply decorated without lacy frou-frou.

Included in your night's price of \$70 (double) or \$95 (queen) is a full country breakfast. Included will be fresh fruit and juice, banana or blueberry muffins or croissants, French toast stuffed with apple slices, or egg dishes of your choice.

From Memorial Day through Labor Day, lunch will also be available to the public on Saturday and Sunday. Mercier emphasizes that the focus will be on "fresh and simple" menu offerings, such as crab or lobster salad, or grilled swordfish. (The creme brulee will also be available, he assured!)

If all this eating sounds filling and fattening, you have exercise options right at hand for making a day of it.

Just across the road is Fernald's Neck, a Nature Conservancy Preserve. This peninsula is heavily wooded and includes 18,000 feet of Megunticook, from Lake



This room features a queen-sized bed with private bath and balcony.

shoreline. Walking trails wind through the preserve. One loop leads to 60-foot cliffs on the preserve's western shore,

providing a unique view of the lake below. There is bog land here, so wear old shoes.

For more strenuous appetite-building, the Camden Hills trail system begins just two miles down Route 52, on the drive along Megunticook Lake into Camden.

Most people are familiar with the drive up Mt. Battie or the hiking trail up Mt. Megunticook, from Camden Hills State Park.

But another hike can be had at Maiden Cliffs. Look for the sign and a small parking lot on Route 52, the start of the Maiden Cliff Trail. Follow the trail to the left until you reach the cliffs at about one mile. Here, a wooden cross marks the site where an 11-year-old girl plunged to her death in 1864.

Stand back from the edge and enjoy the panoramic views of Camden's inland hills and Megunticook Lake. Return by way of the Scenic Trail, rising above and paralleling Maiden Cliff Trail. The loop is rated beginner to moderate and will take 1½ hours.

A hike up a mountain or through a wooded peninsula, then back to the pleasures of Youngtown Inn — what a perfect day.

• The Youngtown Inn, Route 52 and Youngtown Road, Lincolnville, Maine 04849. Phone (207) 763-4290. Carole Vincent lives in China.