

**NOW AND THEN** Laurie and David Tierney blend old and new in their new boutique hotel created in two brick buildings on North Street.



# Hipster Hotel // BY JEREMY D. GOODWIN

PITTSFIELD TURNS UP THE VOLUME FOR COOL AND COMFORTABLE

» MAYBE the radio says it all. Resting on custom nightstands at the brand-new Hotel on North in Pittsfield are vintage-looking radios, which look more likely to be broadcasting Glenn Miller than hooking up hotel guests with audio delights through Bluetooth technology.

But this very mix of vintage patina and modern convenience is key to the design of Hotel on North, the much-heralded hotel slated to open this May. In some bathrooms, guests can relax in a claw-foot bathtub or

jump into a shower featuring up-to-the-moment fixtures. They can sit at writing desks made by hand from reclaimed wood while zipping through some of the fastest Internet speeds in the region. (Hotel on North is served by an ultra-quick fiber-optic connection.)

"It's kind of a bow to the past and a nod to the future," co-owner Laurie Tierney says of the overall aesthetic.

Currently, hotel rooms in Pittsfield's city center can be found only at the 179-room Crowne Plaza Berkshires (formerly the Berkshire Hilton),

on the fringes of downtown. The \$14-million Hotel on North project, with 45 rooms in all, will offer the first competition in the hotel space since the late-1960s. And, crucially, it offers a significantly different product.

The self-described "bou-

tique hotel" features a long list of customized features. Each room is different not only in its floor plan but also in its wholly original character. In some, existing wooden beams or exposed brick add to the urban-chic feel. Rooms in one wing have extra-high



**JAZZ SINGER** Wanda Hoston's backyard is the Berkshires. If she wasn't so nocturnal, she'd "brek-kie" at Joe's Diner. Lunch? Widow Bingham's Tavern at Red Lion Inn. Dinner? A friend's home with good conversation, wine, candles. Cultural venue? The Mount. Outdoors? The Mount's gardens. How lovely.

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the **vibe** | *hospitality*

ceilings. There's the "library suite," with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves on two walls. One room has huge picture windows framing a view of North Street. Another is outfitted with a Japanese soaking tub.

Tierney and her husband, David, who is the head of the well-known, family-owned general contracting firm that's constructing the hotel, bought two adjacent buildings on North Street in 2012 with the hotel in mind. The project's architect is David's sister, Karen Tierney Hunt.

The site is emblematic of both the promise and peril of high-profile efforts to raise Pittsfield's cachet. The side-by-side brick buildings were built in the 1880s. Both are on the National Historic Register, and the former Besse-Clark department store was a local landmark for more than 80 years. The chic restaurant Spice opened here in 2006 amid champagne toasts and confident declarations about the urban upswing in the city. But over the years, the eatery has temporarily shuttered its doors and changed ownership; its most recent incarnation closed for good after last year's summer season. A few other restaurants have tried to make things work in the space next door, with varying success.

(That space is now being remodeled to be leased again, with a potential gift shop in mind.)

The restaurant space will be incorporated into plans for the hotel, and Brian Alberg—the Berkshires' homegrown celebrity chef—is running the food service. Fans who have tasted his handiwork at the Red Lion Inn or at special-event tastings elsewhere may be surprised to hear that he doesn't feel his truest personality as a chef has yet been realized.

"This, I would say, is me. This is my persona," he says one afternoon in the former and future dining room, amid construction work and fire-alarm tests. He describes the menu of the newly named Eat as "globally inspired, locally sourced" and seems downright giddy about a planned food bar offering meatballs and tacos. Family-style meals with fare like pork shoulder and leg of lamb will be on the menu as well, he says.

Main Street Hospitality Group, the operations entity behind the Red Lion Inn, Porches Inn, and the Williams Inn, was brought in to manage Hotel on North. The group's chief executive officer Sarah Eustis and chief operating officer Bruce Finn have been onsite since construction began in

September, mapping out the details.

Visitors will enter the hotel lobby through a revolving door facing North Street, and the restaurant will sit to the left. An open-air atrium will stretch from the second floor upwards, and each floor will have a common area that overlooks it. On a tour of the décor-in-progress, Eustis points to the wall sconces, end tables, curtains, vanities, and other items that have been custom-designed for each room by Berkshire artisans.

Room rates will start at \$179 per night, though the three extended-stay suites could reasonably command more. The individual nature of each room design might even motivate guests to adopt favorites or try different rooms and compare.

Finn, who is also general manager of the Red Lion Inn, had his first job in the hospitality business as a busboy at the old Berkshire Hilton. He sees this boutique hotel aiming at a sweet spot that other places of lodging have bypassed. "We're not Wheatleigh. We're not Blantyre. But we're also not a chain hotel, either," he says. "It's a good niche."

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