

Hendricks Churchill

SURFACE

From Bennington, Vermont's The Seminary, 'Place in Mind' Hospitality Group Emerges

A restoration-minded venture from Rafe Churchill and Casey Sunderland, dedicated to the resurrection of architecturally significant hotels and inns

By David Graver
Photographs by Place in Mind
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In close proximity to Bennington and Williams Colleges, and cultural beacons like the Clark Art Institute and Mass MoCA, upon an idyllic plot where the Berkshires have given way to Vermont's Green Mountains, [The Seminary](#) comprises more than five guest rooms with en-suite bathrooms, an expansive attic suite, and common spaces with ten-foot ceilings—all dressed in warm, inviting interiors by lauded architecture and interior design firm [Hendricks Churchill](#). The storied property—built in 1829 as part of an all-boys boarding school, later a country club, then a writers' retreat, and finally a private residence for 60 years—acts as a flagship for [Place in Mind](#), a new hospitality group founded by Rafe Churchill and Casey Sunderland that acquires, or partners with, then restores architecturally significant hotels and inns.

Churchill—principal and creative director of the aforementioned Litchfield County-based firm Hendricks Churchill alongside his wife Heide Hendricks—bought the property about a year and a half ago, an acquisition that coincided with a decision to scale back their studio's architectural projects. The pivot gave Churchill time to consider what complete creative freedom could look like, and how he could meet the demand for the lived-in Hendricks Churchill aesthetic (knowing that they turn away over 100 inquiries every year).



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With Casey Sunderland, Hendricks Churchill's managing director, Churchill began to discuss what it would mean to form a hospitality group dedicated to salvaging and restoring historic American properties. What began as an exercise in branding transformed into a mission to exact a name that encompassed the nostalgia travelers dream of bottling after a weekend away. After frequent collaborator (and now Place in Mind partner) Conor Brady referred to the Roundstone, Ireland guest accommodations named Within The Village, something struck Churchill. "I've got a place in mind," he said. And Place in Mind was born.

"We're not just opening a hotel; we're launching a brand, focused on hospitality, but it's going to do a lot of other things," Churchill tells Surface. "The goal is to save historic buildings or resurrect businesses like an inn that has lost its path in an at-risk building. But, you can't have a brand be theoretical. You need a foundation. The Seminary is our proof of concept."



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Bennington, Vermont spoke to Churchill, who graduated from the college in 1991. “I was raised as a third-generation tradesperson,” he says. “For me, Bennington was everything. The college took my life and set it onto a different course. I started feeling my love for the school again because my kids were there.” Churchill began by looking for a place to buy that he could take on as a project and ultimately share with college trustees, alumni, friends, and their respective families. He found several places, but with The Seminary, “I walked in the front door and understood that it was not a house. There was something more. It was all written there.”

Churchill bought The Seminary, along with its substantial library of books and piano. Other rarities were acquired—and remain—including a 1920s hand-painted folding screen in one bedroom; the vintage Chippendale-style chest of drawers, Chippendale-style slant-front secretary desk, and club chair reupholstered in Soane linen in another bedroom. The dining room came with a George III mahogany bowfront sideboard and an antique 19th-century dining table that extends to seat up to 16 people. In the living room, Churchill kept a pair of vintage club chairs, which he had reupholstered in Dedar mohair.



There were no significant repairs, but Churchill replaced all the electrical and plumbing. And, he rebuilt The Seminary’s original 21-foot-tall bell tower, with help from three Bennington College students and a neighbor’s kid in the summer of 2025. “Sometimes preservation means putting key architectural elements back where they belong,” he explains. “In this case, the tower

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had been removed over 100 years ago. Eventually, people forgot what it looked like as a seminary. Its historical significance is now made clear with the reproduction of the bell tower.”

“We scaled the design based on old photos, paintings, and drawings,” he adds. “Once built, we simply lifted it with a crane and lowered it back into place, sitting on the original beams that once supported it.” The bell tower’s rope runs from the living room through the ceiling, outside of bedrooms one and two, and into the attic. On special occasions, the bell will be rung from the living room. “My daughter, Hollis Churchill, made the wooden trim pieces mounted on the ceilings and floors that help guide and protect the rope as it travels through the floor framing. These wood pieces are called ‘rope bosses’ and commonly found throughout historic schools, churches, and community buildings.”



To understand the majesty of The Seminary and the vision of Place in Mind requires looking at another property, just around the corner, The Walloomsac Inn, built in 1771, which welcomed Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and innumerable notable guests, but was (mostly) abandoned in the 1990s. “As we were working on The Seminary, we heard the Walloomsac might be for sale,” Churchill says. “It had been in the same family since 1900. I first saw the Walloomsac in 1986 when I came here as a high school student looking at Bennington.

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Apparently it was active then but down to a few rooms. It didn't look all that different than it does today."

At Churchill's behest, after a Google search, Sunderland called an old land line and left a message on an answering machine. An hour later, he got a call back. After negotiations, The Walloomsac Inn became a new addition to the Place in Mind portfolio. "Immediately, we were like 'What in the hell did we just do?' We didn't even know what was on the building's third or fourth floor. We didn't know that it had an accessible tower."



The Walloomsac Inn is an immense undertaking as dozens of downtrodden rooms will be transformed into 40 well-appointed accommodations. Place in Mind will add a restaurant, spa, and gym. "We have completed our initial designs of the floor plans and exterior elevations," Churchill says. "Of course, this process presented us with so many discoveries and opportunities for unique experiences and a range of guest rooms. Ultimately, though, without The Walloomsac, the Place in Mind brand would be only a concept. Instead, it's a monumental idea with tremendous potential reaching far beyond hotels and inns."

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Pieces from The Walloomsac have already found a home in The Seminary, from the painting above the fireplace to the 100th anniversary 13-star flag in the living room, the bar in the dining room, and various collections of ceramic pieces, candlesticks, and ephemera. Unique items—including the sinks in bedrooms one and two, an upstairs hallway desk, a marble-top table in the living room, and several hand-painted chest of drawers—carry forward The Walloomsac’s history.



So much more, including the pencil sharpeners in each room (a functional addition to complement the Place in Minds pencils, and notebooks), can be attributed to Hendricks Churchill’s interior design. “A project without a client is extremely rare,” Churchill says. “In this case we worked in a beautiful bubble of artistic license. We were able to move quickly and remain light on our feet. Every piece of furniture is vintage. Every piece of art is vintage and is almost always in a vintage frame. This is an opportunity for people to immerse themselves in our work. It is not about photographs. It’s about the lived experience and settling in. You light a fire in that fireplace in October and people will not want to leave.”

As much as Churchill appreciates all the moments of discovery he’s designed within The Seminary, and its local touches like the Danby marble counters, harvested from about 45 minutes away, he’s also eager to work with existing, fully operational inns elsewhere “We come in to do an assessment of potential alterations, interior design, branding, and marketing,” he

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says. "We then sit down with the owner and iron out the terms and finances of the partnership. The greatest benefit for a property owner is that they can limit their role to passive ownership, or they can continue to operate their inn under our branding, programming, and marketing." Either way, the property benefits from Place in Mind.

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Architecture and Interiors Studio Hendricks Churchill on “Distinctly American” Design

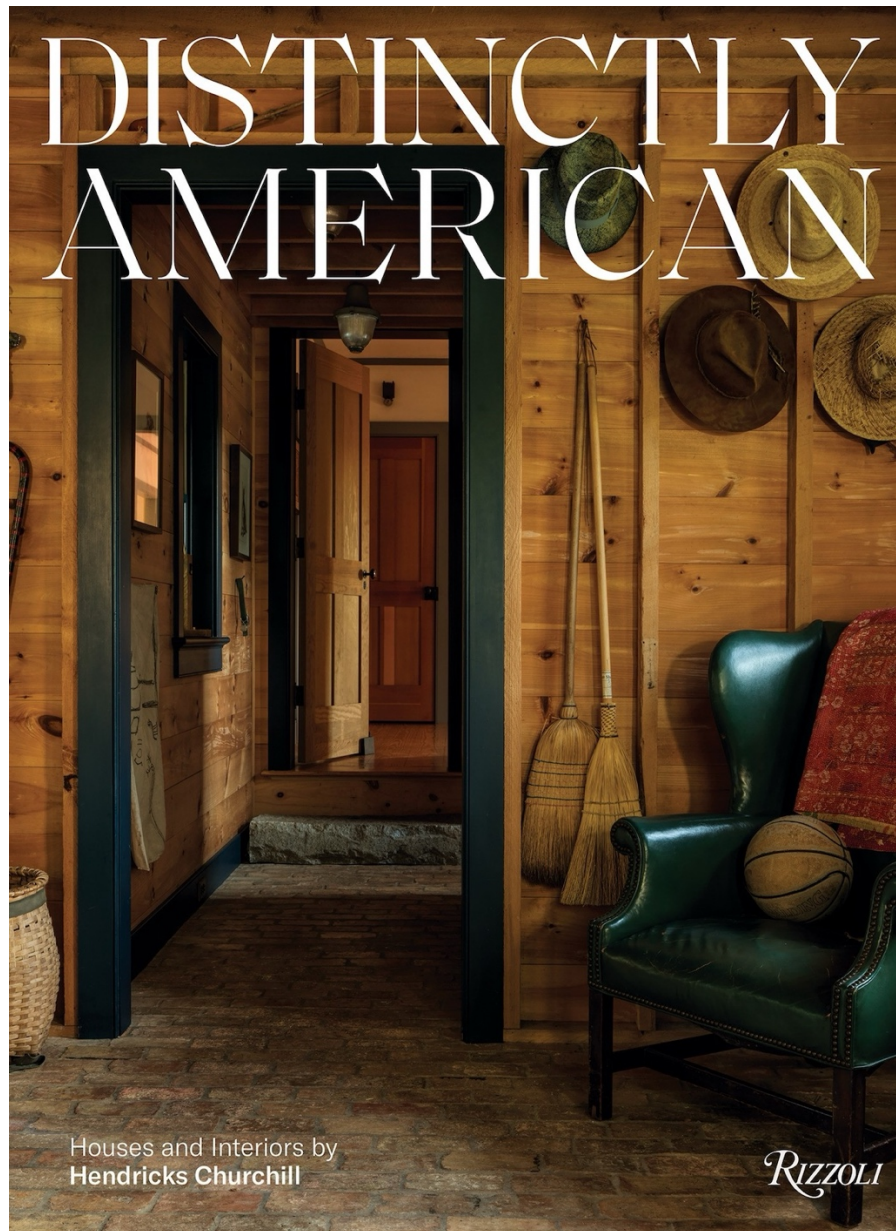
With their second Rizzoli book, Heide Hendricks and Rafe Churchill invite readers into the process behind their signature aesthetic

By David Graver
Photographs by Chris Mottalini
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On September 9, Rizzoli will publish “[Distinctly American](#),” a rich visual study of ten projects by architecture and interior design studio [Hendricks Churchill](#). The monograph is the second Rizzoli release from the duo, following 2023’s “[Our Way Home](#).” While the first took an intimate look at the Litchfield County farmhouse they transformed into their own home, this new book spans the depth of their work—from Hudson Valley restorations to Shaker-inspired interiors on the Upper East Side—and deftly demonstrates the ways in which their aesthetic translates between city and countryside.



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Hendricks and Churchill directed this two-book timeline by accident. “When we were first speaking with Rizzoli about publishing our projects, it was important to us to start with our house—because that represents our unfiltered style. That is what we are like without a client,” Hendricks tells *Surface*. Rizzoli pushed back. The publisher wanted a monograph, which is where most architects and interior designers begin. “We said that what was really important to us was telling the story of our home and how it spans our 25 years of cohabiting and co-building. Rizzoli said, ‘OK, but you’re doing a monograph next.’ So, then we got a two-book deal.”



When it came time to work on their monograph, following the critical and commercial success of “Our Way Home,” Hendricks and Churchill knew that it needed to incorporate work beyond New England. “There are people who bring us in and say, ‘we love the layered comfort, color, and casual vibe that you can produce. We want you to bring that into this more cosmopolitan setting, where we have a white box that we don’t know what to do with,’” Hendricks says. Within the volume, Greenwich Village and Carnegie Hill apartments, as well as a Brooklyn townhouse, bring this transformation to life.



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As for the title, “Distinctly American,” it became a vessel to celebrate architecture born of craftspeople and a connection to local community. “‘Distinctly American’ is an umbrella term not only for our love of the New England vernacular, but for historic architectural styles across the entire country,” she says. “We’ve been spending a lot of time on the road lately, for both fun and business, just driving. The more we drove around the more we got to see beautiful old structures that really resonated with us.”



Hendricks and Churchill wrote this monograph themselves, penning separate introductions and then project descriptions. The first entry—the New Farmhouse—marked their debut as collaborators. “Not only was our brand born with this project but it was also this moment in time where we realized we had something special. We had a look that could be commodified,” Hendricks says.



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“It’s one of our favorite projects,” she adds. “The client showed up to the first planning meeting with a children’s book, ‘One Morning in Maine.’ They said ‘we want a country house with this vibe.’ In the book, there’s a modest home in Maine. It’s practical but it’s so beautiful in its purity and simplicity—without being high design. That was the mandate. We love it when somebody comes to us with something not specific, where it’s about conjuring a mood.”



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Their distinct roles in the studio rarely cross. “That’s the secret,” Hendricks says. “Rafe is very much about the architecture and the backdrop and I am all about the furnishings and the decor. We overlap on finishes—tile, paint, lighting. He has more interest in the decor than I have in the architecture. I just trust him implicitly. It’s what makes our projects so special: the conversation between the furnishings and the tone of the room.”

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In addition to the monograph, Hendricks Churchill has an important announcement on the horizon. “The older we get the more interested we are in democratizing the design that we love—especially because we are drawn to this design that was originally for every person,” Hendricks says. “We are in the process of launching a hotel brand called [Place in Mind](#). Through that we are seeking historic properties and breathing new life into them as hotels and inns—so that people can have a Hendricks Churchill experience for a couple of nights.” Their first will open in Bennington, Vermont next January.

“Right around the corner from that project is The Walloomsac Inn, which was built in the 1700s, and at one time it was the destination in Vermont,” Hendricks says. “Roosevelt would stay there. Walt Disney would vacation there. It’s fallen into ‘Grey Gardens’ disrepair. It’s very haunted. And it’s all ours. That one is a couple of years out. That’s our latest chapter.”