

Hendricks Churchill

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

A Cozy 6-room Hotel in Vermont Is One of New England's Most Charming New Stays

The Seminary is a micro-hotel that recently opened in a historic building in Old Bennington, Vermont. Travel + Leisure was the first to stay.

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Photographs by Place in Mind
August 20, 2026



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The Seminary, a six-room hotel that recently opened in Old Bennington, Vermont, spent much of its 196-year life as a school, a country club, and faculty housing for nearby Bennington College. And sitting in front of a fire in its living room, surrounded by shelves of books left behind by the family who lived here for sixty years, I felt a little like getting lost in time. The building's story began in 1829, when a schoolmaster named James A. Ballard had a falling-out with Bennington's Old Academy, so he built a rival school across town, nicknamed "The Pioneer." After many iterations, by the mid-20th century, the building had passed into private hands, where it remained for decades as the home of a family of writers connected to Williams College.

"Every historic building has a story, but The Seminary, in particular, had one that stood out," says Casey Sunderland, a former talent agent and the co-founder of Place in Mind, the young hospitality company behind The Seminary. "It was nicknamed 'The Pioneer' from the beginning, and I like to think of ourselves as pioneers too. It felt rebellious, and it felt in the same spirit as our new company."

Place in Mind is composed of founders Sunderland and architect Rafe Churchill (one half of the celebrated design firm, Hendricks Churchill, which he has run with his wife, Heide, since 2017), as well as hospitality partner Terry Sanford and brand director Conor Brady. Churchill bought the property in 2025, and he and Heide did the restoration and design themselves.



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New York City-based Grace Fuller, one of the Northeast's most in-demand landscape designers, was still finalizing plans for the grounds during my stay, but it will eventually include fruit orchards, native plantings, and space for outdoor recreation. The most visible piece of the restoration is the bell tower, rebuilt and topped with a new copper roof, with a rope that runs from the bell down through the building to the first-floor living room.

Literature plays a role here, too. When Churchill bought The Seminary, the previous owners (the Williams College-connected family of writers) left their massive book collection on the shelves, which are still there now. And each room holds copies of novels set partly in this literary corner of New England: titles by Donna Tartt and Bret Easton Ellis, both Bennington College alumni, sit alongside the work of legendary artists like Helen Frankenthaler (Bennington class of '49).

I spent much of my downtime in the living room and adjoining library, where floor-to-ceiling shelves wrap the walls, stuffed with the aforementioned volumes, while a baby grand piano sits in the bay window. An antique 13-star Bennington flag stands in one corner as a subtle, unfussy way of tying the house directly to the town's founding-era history.

That connection extends beyond the decor. Place in Mind now hosts Bennington architecture students as paid interns each winter and summer, including two who are currently rebuilding the property's barn. The Seminary, in other words, isn't just built on Bennington ground. It's built, in part, by the town itself.

Below, my complete review at The Seminary.

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The Rooms



No two guest rooms are decorated alike, though all share an unmistakable familiarity, thanks to richly-hued color palettes with a mix of beautifully restored antique furniture; vintage and contemporary art selected by Churchill; and a handmade quilt or woven coverlet, thrown over the foot of every bed.

My spacious room was painted a deep brick red, with a slim antique writing desk, and a claw-foot soaking tub, while vintage issues of *Vermont Life* magazine were placed on side tables and a painted still life hung on the wall. Art, in fact, plays a big role here, and guest rooms and common spaces hold works by Keith Haring, Philip Pearlstein, and Ansel Adams, which are part of a collection Churchill assembles largely on his instinct for what best fits the property's identity and history.

Food & Drink



Given its compact size, The Seminary doesn't have a full-service restaurant, but both mornings during my visit, breakfast was served in the dining room, a moody space covered in a botanical wallpaper of trailing pink blooms and accented with a brass chandelier. The spread was perfect as a start to the day, with fresh yogurt, various granolas, summer berries, and coffee—the kind of breakfast a well-stocked friend's kitchen might produce.

There are more options in town, which are a short drive (or walk) away. I was directed toward a few standouts: for a heartier breakfast, Bennington Bagels or the Blue Benn Diner, a beloved spot on Route 7 that's been feeding the town breakfast-all-day since 1948; lunch at Pappa Charlie's Deli in nearby Williamstown, over the state border in Massachusetts (Coyote Flaco, also in Williamstown, is great for a Mexican dinner); or, back in Bennington, barbecue at Pearls at the Village Garage Distillery. And on a warm evening, ice cream at The Freez.