

Work at a winter rhythm, acquire an art for every season

Slowing down to pair a New England Craft Program with some hill town leisure

By **Kathleen Pierce** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT FEBRUARY 26, 2012



Students learn to make stained glass, glass beads, and blown glass at the New England Craft Program at Snow Farm in Williamsburg.

“Is anyone afraid of fire?” the instructor says as I take a seat at a wooden table in a shed-turned-art studio.

Nope, not here.

Moments later, thrusting a rod of glass into a blue flame a few inches from my face, I think twice. Playing with fire is very different from cozying up to a hearth.



[Photos: Snow Farm's creative campus](#)

But this is no place for fear. I have joined an intrepid mix of artists, glass enthusiasts, and a mother-and-daughter team in the foothills of the Berkshires to bond over alchemy.

We are making glass beads at Snow Farm in Williamsburg on a winter Saturday morning. I signed up for a class at the New England Craft Program to give my left brain a rest and my right brain a jump start.

Amid towering pines and rolling rivers in this snow-covered hill town, the creative spark kindles and flares.

Eight miles from Northampton, Williamsburg is an ideal place for an artistic, rustic retreat. The school on a former 50-acre farm attracts professionals and curious types looking to awaken their muse or heighten their skills across a range of disciplines from welded sculpture to raku-fired pottery.

Can you find such intense hands-on workshops closer to home? Sure, but this pristine region of Western Massachusetts, marked by farmhouses, pure air, and starry night skies, makes the mental to-do lists disappear. Free of daily routines, the slumbering artist emerges.

Because creativity is not always found in the studio, gazing out at the Holyoke Range, devouring a fortifying panino, or going for an invigorating 2-mile hike steps from a brewery works, too. And if that's not enough to inspire, the nearby college town teems with top-notch entertainment, eclectic shops, and quirky art galleries.

After attempting a few lopsided "beads" for three hours, the instructive part of the session ends. Die-hard beaders stay for open studios. The rest of us head for Bread Euphoria, a few miles down Route 9, for après-art.

This cozy full-scale bakery would not be out of place in the other Williamsburg, the hip 'hood in Brooklyn, N.Y. With Dylan on the radio and hearty organic loaves exiting the oven, any self-respecting locavore would be in awe.

Warm apple and parsnip pureed soup, strong coffee, and a comforting ham and Gruyere panino with bold Dijon mustard, set the tone for the afternoon. On the border of restaurant-rich Northampton, Bread Euphoria is that rare spot that pulls foodies and college students west. Any bakery that has several Berkshire Brewing Co. taps at the counter is a sight to behold.

Before checking into Flower Hill Farm Retreat above the village, we check out Williamsburg General Store. This catchall shop with curios, penny candy, ice cream, and a full bakery with just-baked pies lining the counter is worth knocking around for a half hour or so. Teams of spandex-wearing bikers refuel on sweets and caffeine as grandmotherly types eye crafts.

Ready for a catnap, we drive over the bridge in front of the library and climb the high road a few miles out of town en route to our lodgings. There is no sign, but owner Carol Duke sends explicit directions to her restored 1790 farmhouse with three rooms located on a 20-acre hillside with a sweeping view of mountaintops in the distance. We were lucky enough to book the artist studio, which pleased me and my artist husband, who came along for the ride.

In the center of the room is a claw-foot tub facing sliding glass doors. At night the room twinkles with stars. With sconces dimmed and the stunning night sky all around, it is a great place to stargaze. Lying in bed looking out at the constellations is so mesmerizing, you have to force yourself to go to sleep.

But long before night fell, we had more exploring to do.

A ramble up Petticoat Hill as the sun is vanishing is an invigorating hourlong trek. Pushing twilight, we drive into Northampton to check out the shops and galleries and continue our movable creative feast. Of course, you really don't need to step inside any stores in NoHo to feel the beat. The street performers and outdoorsy beatniks rubbing shoulders with Uggs-wearing Smith students is entertainment aplenty.

Bypassing several crowded hotspots, including The Dirty Truth, Toasted Owl Tavern, and Tunnel Bar, we repair to Wiggins Tavern in the basement of The Hotel Northampton. This fort-like space, with low ceilings and tool-marked, hand-hewn wooden beams from the 1700s, is a timeless tumble. A gas fire in the fireplace and a genuine feeling of warmth and community replenish us as do live jazz, coffee, and crab cakes.

But after perusing the old-school menu we decide to head back to Williamsburg for some Cajun fare at Chef Wayne's Big Mamou. The temperature is dropping and a heaping portion of jambalaya sounds spot on.

Pulling into the festive Louisiana restaurant with yellow and purple walls, there is an excitement in the air, even though we are the last diners. The blackened catfish with craw daddy jambalaya and corn bread is terrific. The spices did not overwhelm the dish, but if you need to take it up a notch, Chef Wayne's "Springfield style" sauce is at the ready.

Before turning in for the night, we waddle over to The Brewmaster's Tavern to pick up a six-pack of Opa-Opa as a souvenir. The large brewery and restaurant is just closing, but we spy 28 taps of beer including buckwheat IPA, red rock amber, and blackberry brown ale - an impressive array. This ale that is making inroads in Boston is brewed in a barn attached to the historic former hotel that anchors Williamsburg center.

Back out into the night air, a brisk walk past farmhouses and historic homes illuminated by moonlight is a perfect preamble to sleep. And a sound one it is.

Because we opted for an independent stay, which did not include breakfast (but there was Earl Grey tea and a kettle in this loft-like space), we head to the Blue House Café the next morning. This welcoming vegan-friendly brunch spot, in a section of Williamsburg called Haydenville, is easy to blow by.

Inside the freestanding house with a porch and a down-home feel, a genuine experience awaits. If you like to see and be seen in the morning, the Blue House Café is not for you. But it is perfect for us. We slip in around 10 and have the sunny place with local art and old paperbacks to ourselves. Later a string band will set up and the place will be jumping, the owner tells us.

Still relatively full from dinner the night before, we sidestep the international brunch offerings and breakfast burritos for lighter fare. I devour some coconut banana bread, with raisins and sweetened with maple syrup, enhanced by a cup of Papua New Guinea brew from local roasters Indigo Coffee.

Driving home, we are as relaxed and recharged as if we have spent a week in the tropics. Now, about those beads. Something tells me I will be back for a refresher course.

If you go...

What to do

Snow Farm: The New England Craft Program 5 Clary Road 413-268-3101
www.snowfarm.org Workshops in all disciplines from mosaics to mask making. Weekend classes start at \$205.

Williamsburg General Store 12 Main St. 413-268-3036 www.wgstore.com Full bakery, penny candy, ice cream, crafts, Massachusettsmade maple syrup. Petticoat Hill Petticoat

Hill Road 413-532-1631 www.thetrustees.org Easy two-hour hike with a pleasing summit just steps from the village center.

Where to stay

Flower Hill Farm Retreat 36 Hemenway Road 413-268-7481 www.caroldukeflowers.com Quiet country getaway with stunning views of the Holyoke range and nature at your doorstep. Rates \$150 a night (twonight minimum preferred); \$200 includes breakfast, fresh flowers, and other amenities.

Where to eat

Bread Euphoria 206 Main St., Haydenville 413-268-7757 www.breadeuphoria.com Rustic noshery between Williamsburg and Northampton specializing in pizza, pastries, and gourmet panini. Soup and salad lunch is \$11.

Chef Wayne's Big Mamou 15 Main St. 413-268-8900 www.chefwaynes-bigmamou.com Hearty Cajun feed in a Mardi Gras environment. Heaping portions of jambalaya for \$15.95. Bring your hunger.

Blue House Café 147 Main St., Haydenville 413-268-7441 www.bluehousecafe.info Vegetarian cafe with string bands on the weekends. Breakfast burritos and locally roasted coffee under \$10.

The Brewmaster's Tavern 4 Main St. 413-268-7741 www.thebrewmasterstavern.com
Home of Opa-Opa Brewing Co. serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with 28 beers on tap.
Beer and cheese fondue (\$10.99) and bone-in prime rib (\$29.99).