

southcoastcozy

The ground and trees are bursting with green, and the damp chill of fog is moving through the scenery on the drive south into York County. Before summertime tourists arrive, we set out to greet the spring.



by Sandy Lang | Photographs by Peter Frank Edwards

We're getting close to Kennebunkport, a village well-trodden by presidents and the second-home crowd of New Yorkers and Bostonians. But all is calm on this springtime Thursday. April has just turned to May, and on the two-lane roads near the coves and capes of Kennebunk, we pass few other cars as I look past the dashboard to wildflower-scattered meadows and flag-draped barns. On other Maine escapes, we often stay in a tiny cabin a couple hours to the north that photographer Peter Frank Edwards bought several years ago. For this trip, we've instead driven south of Portland looking for a getaway—three inns in three nights. It's my grand idea for a between-season change of pace. Maine is greening up; the whole state is easing out of winter

hibernation. We are, too—and we're ready to go somewhere, anywhere. Peter Frank is driving. I compose a text to a friend who grew up nearby: "In Kennebunkport. Hungry. Where to?" She answers in seconds. "The Ramp @ Cape Porpoise."

So, that's how we start our weekend, tucking into hot cups of buttery lobster bisque, a plate of golden-battered fish and chips, and pints of beer served under the fish nets and batting helmets that line the overhead beams of the Ramp Bar and Grill at the water's edge. A guy in a Red Sox jacket sits at the bar. Political stickers from Romney (the father's 1968 presidential run) to Obama are mixed in with sports memorabilia. Lobster boats are moored within a few dozen yards of our seats. And there isn't a summer crowd in sight.

KENNEBUNK BARNs & BATHROBES
From the outside, the first inn looks like a large and handsome New England home, and it is one, dating to the 1860s. But inside, the decor of the Inn at English Meadows is surprisingly spare and modern. No clutter here. Creams and whites dominate, with a color or two mixed into each room—sometimes a soft plaid or a deep blue. Showing us around the upstairs bedrooms, innkeeper Liz Brodar demonstrates how to turn on a shoulder-height fireplace that's embedded in the wall like a framed piece of art. I feel the soft wool rugs at my feet, and reach out to touch one of the plush bathrobes that is folded and ready for use on the bed. I'm worn out from the workweek and drive, and could probably sleep well in a flannel sack. But I'm ready to jump right in to one of the inn beds when Liz mentions that she



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Above Roasted pears, tender omelets, hot teas, and coffee are among the typical breakfast fare at the Inn at English Meadows, Kennebunk. **01** The terraced garden and patio tables at Caffe Prego on Shore Road, Ogunquit **02** Lobster stew at the Ramp Bar and Grill on the waterfront at Cape Porpoise **03** Barns and fields of green in the roadside views on the way to Kennebunk **04** Sports, politics, and fishing are part of the conversation (and decor) at the Ramp.

special-orders the yards and yards of deep bedding from Italian textile house Frette.

We walk a few blocks that night to see the neighborhood, stopping in at the wood-framed Old Vines Wine Bar, and checking out the new lane of brightly painted art galleries and shops set to open that weekend right next door to the inn. (The Galleries at Morning Walk have since proved to be a great place to visit with artists and shop for original art and jewelry.) But I don't want to stay out for long in the cool night. I'm feeling the pull of the inn's fireplaces, and I remember seeing a bedside sample of Jacques Torres chocolates. We can always do more exploring in the light of morning.

Spring rain is drizzling outside the next day when we sit in a daylight-filled downstairs dining room for a delicious breakfast, including an omelet with pancetta and roasted tomatoes. The only guests in the nine-room inn that morning, we end up in the kitchen for a long, fun conversation with the innkeepers. I want to know more about the house. Liz and her husband, Eric, explain that it was once a farmhouse with an attached barn, and has been open for guest lodging for more than 75 years. (Guestroom choices include the former tack room and hayloft.) With no innkeeping experience, but an interest in entertaining and cooking, the couple bought the historic house in 2010. Eric describes the style of furnishings at that time as "your grandmother's, *grandmother's* attic." And Liz says they immediately removed all the "dark wallpaper, furniture, lace curtains, and doilies—two full truckloads went straight to Goodwill."

The Brodars previously lived and worked in Manhattan. They sold their house in the Hamptons after they visited southern Maine and felt an instant attraction to the scenery and sensibilities. "There's huge money here, too," Liz says about Kennebunk, "but it's quiet. People here drive beat-up station wagons. In the Hamptons, they'd be in Ferraris and Porsches."

Speaking of cars, we've got travel plans for the day, and soon pack up and start driving (a four-door, not a Ferrari). First stop is Hidden Pond in Kennebunkport, which isn't open for the season yet (it opens in early May), but the staff there say we can look around the woodland-style resort—known for its nightly bonfires and dinners at the open-air restaurant, Earth. I'm interested in the bungalow lodging, and on a wooded lane near Earth, we step inside one that's open. Imagine a rustic cabin that's had a hip, luxury makeover, and that's what the retreat cottages are like—with fireplac-