

## SMALL-TOWN MARYLAND Victorian Update

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Sunday, June 6, 2004; Page P06

### **B&B: The Inn at Norwood, Sykesville, Md. – 33 miles from the Beltway in Carroll County.**

**BEST FOR:** Kicking back, or as the woman at a Maryland tourist center described Sykesville, "Hon, there's not much there. It's just a nice little country town."

**DRIVE TIME FROM BELTWAY:** 49 minutes.

Leaving Arlington at 11:10 on a Sunday morning, we cruised up Glebe Road to Chain Bridge, through Bethesda and onto Highway 185 north. At 11:37, we passed under the Beltway and soon merged onto Highway 97 north. Once we cleared Olney, it became a bona fide country road, with circling hawk, sprouting cornfields and the whoosh of cicada siren songs. We hopped on Interstate 70 east, then Highway 32 to Sykesville.

**THE INN:** The frame house commanding a hill is a 1906 Colonial revival, with all the small-town touches: rocker on the front porch, American flag, tail-wagging dog. In this case, a Labradoodle (cross between a Labrador and a poodle) named Macey. Inside, the look is Victorian-meets-HGTV. Period furniture and swagged windows are old-school, yet the red dining room walls would undoubtedly freak a proper Victorian matron.

Sliding into the roles of small-town snoops, we poked our noses into three of the four second-floor guest rooms, named after seasons. Themes are risky, but fortunately here they're used for color cues -- russets for Fall and pastels for Spring -- rather than, say, plopping a cute little snowman and a miniature sled on the dresser for Winter.

The Secret Garden, where we stayed, is in a small, cottage-style building behind the house. A trompe l'oeil painting of a Tuscan scene graces one wall, and an indoor fountain bubbled over smooth rocks. The owner's mother, Eva, showed us around, flicking on the surprisingly realistic faux flames of the cast-iron electric stove. "You can have the flames without the heat," she revealed. So we got the best of both worlds -- the coziness of a roaring fire and the coolness of a roaring air conditioner. A plate of homemade chocolate-chunk cookies endeared the place to me even more, though I would have traded the small TV/VCR for a CD player.

My husband, Paul, succumbed to a nap in the temptress of a pillow-piled featherbed, while I engaged in one of my favorite voyeuristic activities, reading the guestbook. "After three happy years of marriage, my husband finally treated me," one entry began. Hmm . . .

The next day, breakfast was a feast, with yogurt and fresh fruit, a souffle-like egg dish, bacon, herbed cheese biscuits and coffee cake.

**WE'D GO BACK FOR THE . . .** whirlpool tub for two with a flotilla of rubber duckies -- plus plenty of candles to turn the mood romantic.

**WE COULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT THE . . .** window air-conditioning unit right next to the bed (guest rooms in the main house are cooled by central air).

**THE EXPERIENCE:** Though the area saw Civil War action, we were more aware of the modern battle shaping up -- small towns vs. McMansions. Developments are popping up all around the countryside. Fortunately, Sykesville is on the National Register of Historic Places. Exploring nearby Main Street, we

found a couple of stores offering housewares and antiques; there's also a day spa, Samsara (7606 Main St., 410-552-6900, [www.samsarasalonandspa.com](http://www.samsarasalonandspa.com)), but it's closed Sundays and Mondays, when we visited.

We drove about 20 miles west of Sykesville to New Market, self-proclaimed antiques capital of Maryland. More than 15 antiques shops crowd its Main Street, selling everything from musty Readers' Digest Condensed Books to a \$14,000 highboy.

Skillfully avoiding buying anything quaint or charming, we left New Market to visit Maryland's largest wine producer, Linganore Winecellars (13601 Glissans Mill Rd., Mount Airy, 301-831-5889, [www.linganore-wine.com](http://www.linganore-wine.com); tastings and tours free on non-festival days), where a wine festival was in full swing. The \$10 entry bought a souvenir glass, tastes of 19 wines, a cellar tour and the chance to stretch out on a grassy hill and listen to live blues. Winemaker Anthony Aellen is a fist-pounding populist, and his tour -- complete with a rant about wine snobs -- was worth the price of entry, though some of his vintages brought back best-forgotten college memories of Boone's Farm.

Entering the communing-with-nature portion of our trip, we rescued a baby bird from the middle of the road and handed it into the care of a nearby turkey farmer, then came upon a deer, also in the middle of the road. Fortunately, the deer rescued itself. We cruised through green tunnels of trees and rolling farmlands as we headed up Woodville Road to Highway 26.

A 15-minute drive from the inn, off Highway 26 (avert your eyes from the McMansions), is Piney Run Park (30 Martz Rd., 410-795-3274; \$6 per car for non-residents), which offers boating, fishing, hiking trails and a nature center. The 300-acre lake is stocked with fish; \$7 an hour will get you a canoe, kayak or rowboat. It would be a great way to pass a lazy afternoon, but in this day's brutal sun, we would have sizzled like rotisserie chickens.

WHERE TO EAT: Mealey's Restaurant (8 Main St., New Market) has long been a destination for escapees from the District. We stopped by for the Sunday brunch buffet -- a bargain at \$16.95, with everything from made-to-order omelets to peel-and-eat shrimp to eight homemade desserts. In the name of research, I tried them all.

One of the area's top restaurants is just a few minutes' stroll from the inn: Baldwin's Station (7618 Main St., Sykesville; dinner for two about \$85), set in a renovated 1883 brick railway station, with a nice combo of upscale menu and down-home service. When Paul couldn't decide which soup to order (mushroom bisque or roasted tomato), our waiter brought both. It only got better when the rack of lamb with cucumber coulis and tabbouleh arrived. Yes, just another quaint, small-town meal.

INFO: Inn at Norwood, 7514 Norwood Ave., Sykesville, Md., 410-549-7868, [www.innatnorwood.com](http://www.innatnorwood.com). Rooms from \$90 to \$190 per night. Although the Secret Garden room is normally \$160, I negotiated a Sunday-night price of \$150, including tax. Small dogs can bunk in the Secret Garden or the Loft for an additional \$20 per night.