



A guest room (left) and the gardens (above) of The Union Street Inn. Below: the most luxurious suite on the top floor of the Nantucket Hotel and Resort.

US's two top hotels are close to home

► MUTHER
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had no idea I was a travel writer. To the staff I was simply a strange man who wandered the property like a lost ferret.

I meandered to the ground level and found a large game room for kids, a surprisingly spacious fitness facility, a spa, and a studio for yoga and fitness classes. More importantly, I found the hot tub.

The more I explored, the more I realized how special the property was. The 1891 hotel was restored five years ago into a true resort. Looking from the street you'd never know that there were two large heated pools (one for adults, and one for families) and multiple areas for lounging in front of gas fire pits.

This was a solid, comfortable property with a Cape Cod-meets-Kelly Wearstler flair. I still wasn't sold that this was the best hotel in the country. Then I met Sue Champagne. No, Sue Champagne is not my imaginary friend who appears after I've sipped too much bubbly. She is the concierge at the hotel. If there is a sainthood status for concierges, I'd like to nominate



KIT NOBLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Champagne for the honor.

I was idly looking at pamphlets and maps in the lobby when she approached and started drumming up activities and itineraries for me. She sat down and carefully mapped out bike routes and offered to make dinner reservations. When I told her it was my first time at the hotel she excitedly asked if I wanted the grand tour. I got a glimpse inside the hotel's incredible suites that felt more like stand-alone beach houses. These rooms offered sweeping views and full kitchens. If I was lucky enough to be in a suite at the

height of summer riding the olde tyme shuttle and frolicking in the heated pool I suspect I would be swooning over the experience.

After the tour, Champagne offered to set me up by the fire with a blanket (it was chilly), and then fetched me a Diet Pepsi. I could also make s'mores over my personal fire if I so wished. The TripAdvisor algorithm was beginning to make sense.

I'd place the Nantucket Hotel and Resort high on my list of beloved hotels. My only complaints — and these are minor — were that the coffee mak-

er in the room was a bit old fashioned for a hotel of this caliber, and I didn't find the breakfast buffet particularly interesting. There are hundreds of TripAdvisor users who disagree, so please take my opinion with a grain of salt and a shot of tequila.

Meanwhile, down the street, another historic Nantucket property is also basking in the TripAdvisor limelight. The Union Street Inn took top honors as the best small hotel in the United States. Again, that's the best small hotel in the entire country.

Naturally, I needed to stay a night

there as well. At first blush, the 12-room Union Street Inn is not normally the kind of place I'd gush over. I lean toward modern accommodations, while Union Street is decidedly cozy and traditional.

But it didn't take much for Union Street to win me over. The bed and its high-end Frette linens and Matouk duvets were pure luxury. I am obsessed with hotel toiletries, and the inn supplied one of my favorite brands, Malin + Goetz. Union Street Inn was small, but it thinks big. If there's such a thing as a boutique bed and breakfast, this was it.

It claims to be the only bed and breakfast on Nantucket to serve a full, cooked-to-order gourmet breakfast. If you're feeling antisocial you can also take your breakfast in bed. I consider myself a connoisseur of blueberry pancakes, and mine were just the right balance of fluffy and flavorful. In the afternoon there are cookies and other treats left out for guests to enjoy. There isn't shuttle service to the beach, but after all of those pancakes and cookies, you'd be well served to rent a bike and get some exercise.

The inn is located in a restored 1770 whaling captain's home, so there isn't space for pools and hot tubs, but there is a beautiful garden in the back. The service was extraordinary, and just like at the Nantucket Hotel & Resort, the staff did not know I was a travel writer reviewing the property.

On the ferry back to Boston I flipped through my notes and started plugging away at my own algorithm to determine if I had just stayed at the top hotel and the top small hotel in the country. My algorithm failed to produce an answer as definitive as TripAdvisor's, but it did tell me that we're lucky to have such charming and top-notch hotels nearby.

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Summer rates at the Nantucket Hotel & Resort range from \$650 to \$4,945 per night. Winter rates range from \$195.00 to \$1,220 per night. Spring and fall rates range from \$225 to \$3,220.00 per night. www.nantuckethotel.com, 866-807-6011.

Summer rates at the Union Street Inn range from \$399 to \$729 per night. After Columbus Day, rates fall to \$189 to \$319 per night. The inn is closed in winter. www.unioninn.com, 508-228-9222.

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True or 'Valse'? Eccentric art museum features genuine fakes.

By Claudia Capos
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VLEDDER, Netherlands — All is not quite what it appears to be at the Valse Kunst Museum in Vledder, a Dutch farming town with neat brick houses and coiffured peony gardens nestled among griddle-flat cornfields and dairy farms in north-central Netherlands.

The museum, ensconced in Vledder's former town hall, showcases nearly 100 paintings bearing the names of many Dutch Masters, including Rembrandt and Vincent van Gogh, as well as other world-renown artists, such as Picasso, Matisse, and Salvador Dali. Rare carved-wood and stone sculptures, exotic blown-glass art, old coins, vintage Rolex watches, and foreign stamps fill the museum's shelves and display cases.

As Doug and I stroll through the galleries, we spot one of our favorite paintings, Georges Seurat's "Port-en-Bessin, un dimanche." The Impressionistic oil-on-canvas work captures the soft pastel image of sailboats bobbing in a cozy harbor on France's Normandy coast on a Sunday morning. The problem is, we saw the nearly identical Seurat painting hanging in the Kröller-Müller Museum last week. The one we're now admiring is a forgery.

But then, so are all the other paintings and works of art on display in the Valse Kunst, or Fake Art Museum.

Museum founders Henk and Erna Plenter hatched the idea of collecting and exhibiting fraudulent art after they were fleeced by an art dealer in Amsterdam's Spiegelkwartier who sold them a bogus Matisse lithograph depicting a stylized blue figure of a woman. The couple wanted their eccentric museum to educate serious art collectors about forgeries and to entertain curiosity seekers.

Since 1998 when the museum

opened, the Plenters' collection has attracted enough spurious art donated by other duped buyers to fill three large exhibition rooms in the former town hall. Today, the museum has the somewhat dubious distinction of being the Netherlands only institution dedicated to fake art.

"People are curious and don't know what to expect," says our guide, Sandra Goos. "They take our tour to gain an understanding of fakes and forgeries and to learn how the world of fraudulent art works."

For decades, fake art has been a multimillion-dollar business worldwide. It still is today. Two of art history's most notorious forgers, Han van Meegeren and Geert Jan Jansen, gained widespread notoriety while amassing incredible fortunes. Their brazen exploits and prolific works have been featured in art books and magazines and on television. Many of these mountebanks' masterpieces fooled even the most experienced curators and ended up in prestigious galleries, auction houses, and private collections.

"These fakes were sold as 'original' artwork to buyers who paid high prices for them," Goos says. "Today, they have no monetary value. But all of them have fascinating stories." She leads us past an M.C. Escher print, a Paul Klee pen-and-ink drawing and a Fernando Botero painting of two rotund dancers. We also spot several colorful works by Joan Miro, Marc Chagall, and Karel Appel. They actually look as though they could pass for the real thing. But they're all as bogus as a \$3 bill.

Detecting fake art is not easy. The devil is in the details, according to Goos. In one knockoff of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," the woman's pursed lips are too red, her eyes are too narrow and her fingers are overly plump. In a copycat version of Jo-



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



Guide Sandra Goos with a visitor to the Valse Kunst Museum. Left: a forged copy of Auguste Rodin's bronze sculpture "The Thinker."

hanne Vermeer's "Girl With a Pearl Earring," the forgers darkened the young lady's complexion, giving her an exotic look. A religious statue from Asia, acquired by an antiquities collector, has lost chunks of its veneer, which was created by smoke from a fire rather than the passage of time.

Van Meegeren was so adept at forging paintings and using techniques to mimic centuries-old masterpieces that

he fooled Nazi party leader Hermann Goering into paying a hefty sum for a falsified Vermeer. At the end of World War II, the Allies found the forgery in Goering's possession and arrested van Meegeren for being a Nazi collaborator. To prove his work was a fake and thereby escape the death penalty for treason, the wily art dealer re-created another painting during his trial. Van Meegeren was convicted of falsifica-

tion and fraud, but died before serving out his prison sentence. During his dubious career, it is estimated he swindled buyers, including the Netherlands government, out of \$30 million. This strange tale of artistic deception was featured on the Travel Channel's "Mysteries at the Museum" in 2014.

These days, many reproductions of famous works of art are being churned out by low-paid laborers in sweatshops in China and other parts of Asia, according to Goos. High-tech forgery techniques have made these replicas increasingly difficult to distinguish from the originals.

"We continue to get donations of false art from people who have found paintings and other valuables in their parents' attics," Goos says. "Forgers will try just about anything. Often you never really know which art pieces are genuine and which are not."

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