

America's finest B&B's

By Alessandra Bulow, Food & Wine

Tacky tchotchkes, floral wallpaper and store-bought muffins might come to mind when you think of bed-and-breakfasts, but America's best B&Bs are beautiful houses with fantastic, often homegrown food.

Former estates make the most impressive properties, such as Vrooman Mansion in Bloomington, Ill., which was once home to Carl Vrooman, assistant secretary of agriculture under President Woodrow Wilson. In these stately homes, owners preserve architecture and woodwork (along with plenty of antiques) while updating rooms with modern amenities. Great breakfasts may be lavish, like the lump crab Benedict at Robert Morris Inn in Oxford, Md., or as simple as homemade yogurt and granola served on a private patio at the Inn at Dos Brisas in Washington, Texas.

The Wickwood Inn in Saugatuck, Mich., is among the exceptional food-focused options. Innkeeper Julee Rosso cowrote "*The Silver Palate Cookbook*" series, which has sold more than 6 million copies. Rosso, who helped revolutionize home entertaining, flaunts her expertise with elaborate Champagne brunches, homemade afternoon sweets and evening hors d'oeuvre buffets.

The Gastonian, a restored 19th-century mansion in Savannah, Ga., incorporates Southern flavors in breakfast dishes like poached eggs with country sausage and cheese grits. The owners offer hors d'oeuvres and wine every afternoon — and desserts and cordials in the evenings.

In Asheville, N.C., Black Walnut co-owner Lori White goes to the farmers' market each morning to shop for three-course breakfasts. White and her husband owned bakeries in Palm Beach and Martha's Vineyard before pursuing their dream. "I giggle when I come to work now, because I'm so excited to cook for our guests," she says. Their inn was built by the same architect who designed the Vanderbilt family's nearby Biltmore Estate.

Many bed-and-breakfasts now have serious restaurants as well. At Willows Inn on Lummi Island in Washington state, chef Blaine Wetzel — who has worked at Copenhagen's acclaimed Noma — creates visually stunning dishes with produce from the inn's organic farm.



Robert Morris Inn; Oxford, MD

Chef-proprietor Mark Salter recently renovated this 16-room inn, which was originally home to Robert Morris, "Financier of the Revolution" and a close friend of George Washington's. The signature breakfast is a take on eggs Florentine with spinach, Maryland jumbo lump crab and Meyer lemon hollandaise sauce. *Rooms from \$120; www.robertmorrisonn.com.*

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