



Left to right: Hampton Terrace Bed and Breakfast Inn, Lenox; Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield.

Below: Hampton Terrace's Bonner Room

A Month of Weekends: 4 Easy Escapes

1 Berkshires Cultural **Blitz**

By Catherine Censor

It's no secret that I love the Berkshires (see last year's article chronicling my previous visit). They're close, the scenery is spectacular, and the cultural offerings can't be beat. But if you've already done the Tanglewood/Jacob's Pillow/Lenox/Stockbridge tour, or you're just looking for a few new favorite destinations, I've got you covered.

If you've got your mouth fixed for bucolic New England charm, you might buzz through the small city of Pittsfield without a second thought. During my early summer visit, all the sidewalks were torn up as part of a massive beautification project—which didn't exactly enhance its appeal. Still, if you miss Pittsfield, you'll miss some of the area's best art, dining, and theater.

The Barrington Stage Company (30 Union St., 413-236-8888, www.barringtonstage.org) produces first-rate theater. In 2004, this group developed and premiered *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, which went to Broadway and won two Tony Awards. Tickets are remarkably affordable with some going for as little as \$15! Just a few blocks away, you'll find the Colonial Theatre (111 South S., 413-997-4444, www.thecolonialtheatre.org), a painstakingly restored vaudeville house that gets acts ranging from Mandy Patinkin to touring productions of *The Producers*.

If you're more of a visual arts fan, visit the Ferrin Gallery (437 North St., 413-442-1622), one of the nation's premier ceramic art and sculpture galleries. And if you've got kids in tow, put the Berkshire



Museum (39 South St., 413-443-7171) at the top of your list. This small gem has the spirit of 19th century eclecticism. You'll find an Egyptian mummy, dioramas of global fauna, fine art and sculpture, minerals, and modern, interactive exhibits such as a touch tank, hands-on archeological "dig," and playful technological "toys." Speaking of toys, children of all ages will love the wooden mechanical toys designed by artist Alexander Calder. The originals are on display but you and your kids can play with functional replicas.

Hungry? Pittsfield has everything from Indian, Mexican, and Asian Fusion to a French bistro, a tapas bar, and our choice for Saturday dinner, Trattoria Rustica (26 McKay St., 413-499-1192), which specializes in southern regional Italian cuisine. The setting is warm and cozy, with brick-lined walls, and the food is authentic and homemade. The whole, grilled fish of the day garners raves.

My home for the weekend was admittedly a repeat: Lenox. Centrally located and home to some of my favorite restaurants (Alta Restaurant and Wine Bar at 34 Church St. for contemporary, French-accented cuisine, and Gateways Inn at 51 Walker St. for owner Fabrizio's memorable hospitality and wine list and his wife, Rosemary's equally memorable homemade cuisine), Lenox is big on both bucolic charm and Gilded Age romance. This time, I stayed at Hampton Terrace Bed and Breakfast Inn (91 Walker St., 413-637-1773, www.hamptonterrace.com), one of the first grand "Berkshire cottages" to host guests.

My room featured a functional fireplace, a wonderful bed so high off the ground that I was thankful for the step stool next to it, gobs of cottage-y charm, and an enormous bathroom with original, built-in storage and fixtures that politely could be called "familiar" (aqua-blue toilet with matching sink and shower). For those who really care about their plumbing fixtures, the modern rooms in the annex feature Jacuzzis. An in-ground, heated pool was an unexpected bonus, as was the hot entrée with the complimentary breakfast.

Owner Stan Rosen says that about 50 percent of his business is repeat clientele, visitors who return year after year for Lenox's many cultural offerings. Tanglewood, summer home of the Boston Pops, and Shakespeare & Co. (70 Kemble St., 413-637-3353, www.shakespeare.org), a Berkshires treasure that performs new plays in addition to top-notch interpretations of the Shakespearean classics. We saw a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* that was one of the highlights of our stay.

Speaking of "high," you can either hike or drive to the summit of Mount Greylock in Lanesborough. At 3,491 feet, this is the highest point in Massachusetts, and from the WPA-era Veterans War Memorial Tower, you can enjoy spectacular views encompassing five states. We stopped there for some photos and fresh air en route to yet more culture in a quaint setting. The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (225 South St., 413-458-2303, www.clarkart.edu) in pretty Williamstown boasts all the big names in French Impressionism (Monet, Manet, Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, et al), English silver, decorative arts, and special exhibits. When we visited we saw an exhibit of work by Georgia O'Keefe and her contemporary, Arthur Dove.

On our drive home, we stopped in Great Barrington to browse in the shops, galleries, and real estate agency (we were tempted), but we settled for a more affordable temptation: homemade Mexicali Chocolate ice cream spiced with cayenne and mint from SoCo Creamery (5 Railroad St., 413-528-9420). We'll definitely be back for more.