

A Touch of the Tropics

Winter garden warms the spirit at The Inn at Weston

By SKY BARSCH

Photographed by CALEB KENNA

THE WINTER MORNING I LEAVE TO visit The Inn at Weston, the sky does not offer a single spot of blue. Thick, gray clouds loom above. The snow, from days of freezing and warming, has cemented. It's a real joy, then, when innkeeper Bob Aldrich brings me into his orchid greenhouse. Here are colors I feel like I haven't seen in months.

Bright violet. Soft pink. Shocking fuchsia.

Bursting with life, these exotic orchids grow from green stalks that emerge from mossy pots. Their home, a glass structure kept at 70–90 percent humidity, feels like a sauna — a welcome change.

The Inn at Weston has all of the amenities you'd expect from a Vermont bed-and-breakfast — spacious rooms



with antique furniture, rich wallpaper, enticing linens, fluffy pillows. The library is overflowing with books and videos. The dining room is set with white tablecloths and napkins, where a piano is played every night; and the pub is a comfy place to enjoy a beer and cozy up to the fire.

But Bob (above) and Linda Aldrich's dedication to botany is what really makes this inn. In the summertime, the landscape is engulfed in flora. And in winter, the orchid greenhouse is a lively contrast to the shoveling and schlepping, the cold days and colder nights.

The Aldriches, who formerly had medical careers in New Jersey, moved to Weston seven years ago with the dream of operating an inn while pur-



suing their love of gardening. Their orchid collection has grown to contain 500 different species, from the common dendrobiums and vandas to the rarer bulbophyllum, maxillaria and neofinetia.

"There's nothing better when it's 6 below outside and it's 80 degrees in there," says Linda, who gives her husband all the credit for maintaining the orchids. But given the couple's history, she may be selling herself short.

"I brought home an orchid 20 years ago from the grocery store," she says. "I brought it home because I thought it was beautiful, and that started the obsession."

There are orchids in guest rooms, the library, and scattered elsewhere indoors. In the summer, the gazebo is filled with orchids, making it a colorful place to dine or relax.

"Linda and I both love to garden," Bob says over a cup of coffee, in a mug painted with orchids.

Within a few minutes of my arrival, a woman opens the inn door and pokes her head in. Bob greets Sandy Nolan, a Massachusetts woman who explains that her niece stayed at the inn once and recommended she come see the orchids. He offers her a look around and entertains her questions about which are the easiest to grow, how much water they need and where to buy them.

"That's not uncommon," Bob explains. Numerous people, from budding gardeners to serious orchidists, randomly drop in to see the flowers and learn about orchid growing. "It's something that's unique about us. Ninety percent of our guests want to go through the greenhouse." 🌸

The Inn at Weston

Where: 630 Main St., also Route 100, Weston

When: Open all year except a two-week period in November and April

Room rates: \$185 for a room in the Coleman House, located across the road from the main inn (an 1848 farmhouse), to \$325 for suites in the Carriage House. All rooms have phone, private bath, air conditioning, and include breakfast. Nine of the 13 rooms have fireplaces. All but two have televisions.

Dining room: Open to the public at 5:30 p.m. Reservations recommended. The Aldriches also own and operate Café at the Falls, a restaurant at the nearby Weston Playhouse.

Phone: (802) 824-6789

Website: www.innweston.com

Diversions: The inn sits in central southern Vermont, allowing easy access to attractions to the east or west. The small but active town of Weston is home to The Vermont Country Store and the Weston Playhouse, which hosts New York-caliber theater. Okemo, Stratton, Bromley and Magic Mountain ski areas are nearby, though the inn tends to attract more Nordic skiers and snowshoers to nearby Viking Nordic Center. Antiquing is popular in the area, and the Manchester Center designer outlets are a short drive away.

