

Travel ✓ Added

Peace amid the brickyards: an upstate utopia in New York

Once an industrial centre, a slice of land off the Hudson has been restored with hipster cabins, walking trails and a spa — all catering to city dwellers' need to escape

Lilah Raptopoulos 4 HOURS AGO

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“I’m so sorry, we’re a little delayed,” said Suzie, a receptionist, running out to apologise. We were standing on a pristine lawn outside Edgewood Terrace, a historic mansion in Kingston, New York, that now serves as the reception for its newest hotel. Our car had disappeared, swept away by a valet, and we were awaiting a golf cart to drive us across the hotel grounds to our accommodation. We were drinking tiny cans of sparkling rose. I assured her we were very happy.

“You sure? You don’t need anything? You want another cocktail? I can get you another cocktail.” She eyed our bags as if considering slipping another can in.

It was the third weekend in May and the second open weekend for Hutton Brickyards, an upstate utopia two hours north of New York by rail or car and just over 10 miles south of Woodstock (yes, that Woodstock), where the Hudson Valley meets the Catskills. They were scrambling a bit, understaffed as most hospitality is these days (Covid-19 unemployment benefits have made hiring for service jobs slim across the state).

But Oscar soon arrived, filled his cart with our belongings and drove us down a wooded, winding path, describing the history and pointing out unfinished corners for future activities: beekeeping, an apiary, archery, an outdoor gym. We turned a corner. My friend Lily and I let out a unanimous “wow”, and Oscar smiled. They’d designed for that response.

Ahead of us stood “the ruins” in all their majesty: a disintegrating brick wall detached from the ghost of a building past, its wrought-iron door and windows

opening up to a sprawling lawn, tall, ancient trees, and the Hudson River, glittering in the sun. It stoked our sense of nostalgia for America's industrial past, our city-bludgeoned craving for unspoilt nature and, after a long and traffic-filled drive, our need for a nap.



The hotel's grounds run along the Hudson

This was once the world's largest industrial brickmaking region, and the Hutton Company Brick Works one of its most successful producers. Hutton bricks are baked into some of New York's most iconic landmarks, from Yankee Stadium to the Empire State Building to who knows, maybe my brownstone apartment in Brooklyn. The company was actively producing bricks from 1865-1980.

Real estate developer Karl Slovin bought the 73-acre property eight years ago, initially using it as an event space for weddings and concerts. Just before the pandemic he partnered with Salt Hotels, the hip young hotel group founded by David Bowd and Kevin O'Shea, respectively the former chief operating officer for André Balazs Properties and former head of corporate design at Morgans Hotel Group. Together they planned a hotel that was eerily well-aligned to post-pandemic hospitality: 31 freestanding, 300 sq ft socially distant cabins peppered along the waterfront, a semi open-air restaurant, pavilions, walking and biking trails and a spa.

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This was summer camp without the social pressure, I realised. It was a detox, but with cocktails and french fries

Oscar parked outside our small cabin, alongside a row of other identical prefab, wood-panelled, Shaker-inspired huts. Inside it was a pristine, compact, luxury hotel room with a kingsized bed and a trendy subway-tiled bathroom. The far wall was entirely glass, leading out to a

was entirely glass, leading out to a private porch overlooking the Hudson.

For the city-dwelling hipster missing home, six impeccably curated records sat beside a brand new retro record player (Neil Young, Devendra Banhart, and the sine qua non Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*). There was, deliberately, no television. Oscar unloaded, showed us a woven flag that read "thirsty", and helped us secure it outside our door for a visit from the complimentary drinks cart at 5pm.

We unpacked, took naps, read on the porch. Lily did some yoga, I wrote in my journal. We looked at each other, sitting in our urban, addled anxiety. Now what?

The thirsty cart came. A friendly bartender gave us two more cans, this time of margaritas. We poured them over ice and stepped out to explore the property.



The cabins sit in an idyllic, peaceful setting

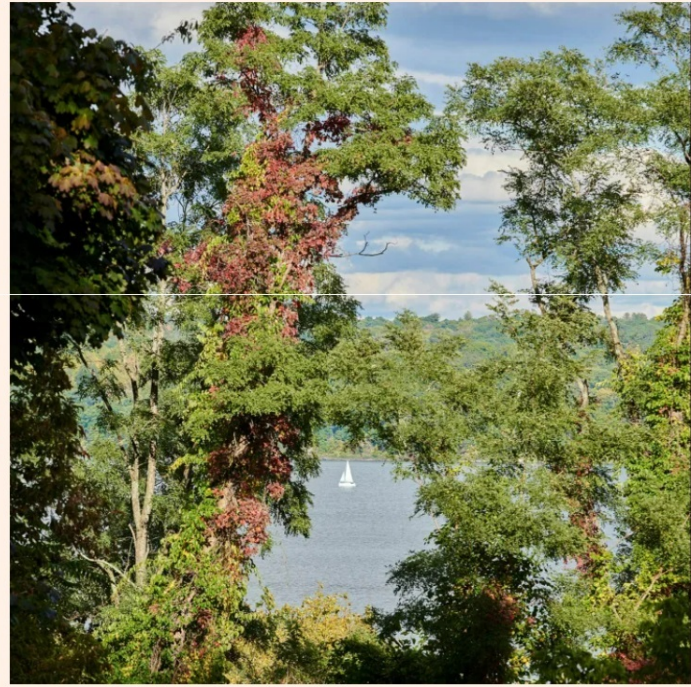
Hutton's industrial remnants litter the property, spooky, grand and nostalgic. The paths are made of bricks inscribed with "Hutton". Walk to the river's edge and piles of leftover bricks fill the dip between grass and water — thousands apparently lie below the surface.

We walked past the restaurant and through the empty open-air event pavilion, past a couple envisioning their 2022 wedding. We passed the abandoned brickyard itself, three massive dilapidated kiln sheds cordoned off with Danger signs, and a giant, picturesque, rusted out crane which once loaded barges with the bricks that built New York. We sat on two chairs at the edge of the property, watching the river. A train crawled along the opposite coastline, tooting, engine whirring like a toy. A sailboat passed and its occupants waved. A pick-up truck on a nearby public beach drove out of the water, pulling a jet ski on to the

on a nearby public beach drove out of the water, pulling a jet ski on to the mainland.



The ruins of the old brick factory



The hotel's surrounding trails provide more views of the river © Jane Beiles

Utterly aimless, we wandered to the restaurant, the heart of the property: a massive, cavernous outdoor space with a slew of heaters, a spacious lounge area and chic dividers filled with piles of Hutton bricks. The menu was small and deeply local, conceived by chef Dan Silverman of New York's Balthazar and Minetta Tavern fame. It was mostly cooked outside, in wood fire ovens and on grills.

We drank Austrian Grüner Veltliner and shared crunchy haricots verts with cinnamon yoghurt dressing, grilled shishito peppers with lime zest, steelhead trout perfectly cooked on a cedar plank, and a big pile of juicy wood-roasted chicken from the nearby Snowdance farm. Dessert, a cheese board with fresh sourdough and local honey and a bright red poached rhubarb strawberry something, was devoured as the sun set.



Pristine, compact and luxurious rooms have private porches overlooking the Hudson

We were tucked into bed by 10, robes on, in a cloud of pillows. By the time I woke up (with a parfait, muffin and canteen of coffee at the front door), the quiet had caught me. I was . . . relaxed. This was summer camp without the social pressure, I realised. It was a retreat without the yoga schedule. It was a detox, but with cocktails and french fries. Salt Hotels had created the life us city dwellers had idealised through the pandemic. In the past year, thousands of New Yorkers had moved to this area to downshift, remote work and escape; for those of us left behind, this was a taste of the fantasy.

As I walked back to the cabin after a massage, the air was filled with poplar fluff from the local aspen trees, a seasonal oddity that floated to the ground like a flurry of snow, collecting on grass and on the restaurant floor, crawling into our cabins and sticking to our clothes.



I met marketing and programming manager Dina Kazan at the restaurant. She was fanning her face to avoid the fluff, laughing that you can't control everything, especially nature, and they sure have a learnt a lot about the property over the past few weeks. She was apologetic, but I loved it. It gave the camp a magical, ethereal quality, like Shakespeare's fairyland.

Kazan moved up last year. "With the pandemic I unplugged for a bit, and I thought you know what? I was moving so fast in the city. You don't even know if you're happy or not because you're going 24/7," she told me. "I would step over really nasty stuff to get on to the subway. Nothing registered."

Like most of the staff, she now lives in Kingston and loves it. She is now scheduling local specialists to come to the hotel, for yoga and pilates classes, kayaking tours and bird shows, in an attempt to integrate with the town. "When all restrictions are lifted and we're allowed to be at capacity, I want to see us have a wedding going on there, have a full house here in the pavilion, be fully staffed, music everywhere, food everywhere," she said. "That's the dream."





Kingston's Rondout Historic District © Alamy

That afternoon we explored Kingston, a town that clearly had two sides. Much of it felt like an upstate town abandoned by the loss of industry, while two neighbourhoods, Rondout and Stockade, were decidedly chic, gentrified by New Yorkers fleeing the city over the past decade. Vintage clothing and antiques were marked at Manhattan prices — sometimes higher. Some of the new shops and bars lacked soul, which could be found in the cracks and corners: a mystic wellness shop, a modest bakery. We had dinner at Le Canard Enchaîné, a local French institution in its 22nd year. Sitting on the sidewalk, over escargot, moules and roast duck, conversation flowed naturally between the tables, three members of the waitstaff and the owner, JJ. We weren't trying hard to mingle. It's just that friendly a town. I rarely return home from holiday remembering so many first names.

That last night, Lily and I walked across the lawn outside our cabin with a twee little electric lantern that had been left for a moment just like this. Wood and cardboard had been set up in the firepit, staged to be lit in a moment just like this. We sat in Adirondack chairs, feet on the brick ledge, listening to guests at the neighbouring firepit.



Post-lockdown dreams: the hotel looks forward to having 'a full house here in the pavilion...'



'With music everywhere, food everywhere' © Scott Rudd

“Could you live up here?” I asked. “How would you feel if you finished your lease and bought a house on the Hudson and this was your life?” It was seductive, for sure. But it was a question I felt had been designed by Hutton: how's this for an imagined future?

I decided this much permanent quiet would probably end for me in a series of panic attacks. But a few weekends a year in a luxury cabin playing lawn games upstate, chatting with Suzie, Dina, Otto and JJ? That may be a down payment I could get behind.

Details

Lilah Raptopoulos was a guest of [Hutton Brickyards](#); cabins sleeping two cost from \$302 per night

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