

Boston

The Ocean House Is Once Again Ready for Its Close-Up

The historic seaside hotel in Rhode Island was set for demolition, but got a makeover instead.

By [Raquel Kaplan](#) | [Roost](#) | June 30, 2014 3:10 pm



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It's a modern-day (commercial real estate) fairy tale. In 2005, Charles and Deborah Royce, summer residents of Watch Hill, Rhode Island, saved the historic, dilapidated Ocean House resort from destruction. The property was slated for demolition and sale by the developer Girouard Associates, but the Royces swooped in and purchased the property. After years of

political maneuvering to secure permits and still more time to conduct the renovation, the resort re-opened to much fanfare. *Forbes* notably gave a Five Star rating to both the Ocean House hotel and spa in 2013. More recently, [Condé Nast Traveler featured the Ocean House](#) on the cover of their “America Issue,” which is on newsstands now.

The Ocean House was built in 1868 in the Victorian style and sits on 11 acres of land mere steps from the seashore. In it’s heyday, the hotel boasted 159 rooms and was even used as a set for *American Aristocracy*, a 1916 silent film starring Douglas Fairbanks. It was popular in an era where people dressed for dinner, sipped martinis, and played croquet after a day at the beach. Royce told *Condé Nast Traveler*:

“I felt strongly that McMansions being put up in the hotel’s place would be so wrong for this community,” says Royce, who after learning about the deal from a group of concerned citizens offered to buy out the developer. “It was an emotional decision. It certainly wasn’t with knowledge of the hotel business, I can assure you.”

Although Royce originally hoped to do a renovation, the building was so old and neglected that a from-the-ground-up reconstruction was necessary. Today, the façade looks just as it used to with the same combination of buttery-yellow paint and white trim and the signature red cedar shingle roof. Thousands of pieces from the original property returned after the renovation including the reception desk, phone booth, and stone fireplace, which was dismantled and resembled stone by stone. Some things could not be saved including 247 windows. In that case, the originals were measured, photographed, remade, and installed in the same locations.

Lead architect Jeff Riley told *Condé Nast Traveler* another, more modern side of the story: “There was no sacrifice of comfort, convenience, acoustics, technology, sustainability, daylight, energy conservation, and maintenance concerns...all the things that you would otherwise associate with a very modern building.”

Perhaps the best modern amenity is the addition of the 12,000-square-foot spa and indoor pool. OH! Spa offers tailored treatments and also couples rooms, outdoor appointments along the 1,000-foot stretch of private beach, and a movement studio. Additionally, the hotel orchestrates four daily and complimentary resort activities that fall into categories such as culinary (wine tasting), spa (yoga), and culture (croquet with a professional).

With a rich history, modern amenities, and gorgeous shoreline, it's no wonder the world is taking notice of Watch Hill's Ocean House. This only proves what New Englanders have known for quite some time, the best place to indulge in sand and sea is right here at home.

This article was aggregated from "A Grande Dame Hotel Is Reborn in Rhode Island" by Pilar Guzmán for the July 2014 issue of Condé Nast Traveler. Ocean House, 1 Bluff Avenue, Watch Hill, RI. Info: (401) 584-7000, oceanhouse.ri.com.