

R&R

— rural roads,
rest and recreation

— at Steve and
Marie Nygren's
Serenbe Bed &
Breakfast

By Jonathan Lerner

AND

R&R



When you get away to Serenbe, take the Maserati and leave your 5,000-pound family truck at home. On the sinuous two-lanes of south Fulton County, you'll want something nimble. There, just 20 minutes beyond the world's busiest airport, are 65,000 rolling acres of woods and pastures, rock outcrops and creeks. The fact that this placid landscape, the Chattahoochee Hill Country, remains unsullied by suburbanization is a miracle. Serenbe, the bed-and-breakfast Steve and Marie Nygren operate in the midst of all that rural beauty, is heavenly too.

The Nygrens know hospitality. Steve cofounded the Peasant Restaurant Group back in '73, when there wasn't much of anywhere in town to eat besides Mary Mac's Tea Room. Marie is former manager of the Women's Commerce Club and also the daughter of Margaret Lupo, longtime owner of Mary

Mac's. Refugees from the city themselves, they — and the hill country — provide just what we harried Atlantans crave: soothing green vistas, privacy and space, and an atmosphere of good taste lightened with the odd folk art sculpture and gardens planned by the whimsical Ryan Gainey. Guest accommodations are scattered in cottages that mimic the look of the area's old barns with dark-stained plank walls and red metal roofs. Cottage 3, where I stayed, has a spacious living room with kitchenette opening to a screened porch and two bedroom suites with spa baths. I was there in August, but if you go soon, you'll appreciate the big fireplace. The interior design, by Marie with help from her designer friend Stan Topol, is luxurious but relaxed. All that prevents Serenbe from assuming its rightful label — country inn — is the fact that they only serve breakfast.

What to do at Serenbe, besides take refreshing drives? There are 12 miles of trails on the property, plus a meditative labyrinth to

walk, a pool and hot tub, a pond to paddle in, a tree house and animals to pet; it's a good destination for kids of all ages. The organic farm, which supplies produce to city folk at the Morningside, Piedmont Park and Spruill Gallery green markets, lets you pick your own.

You can also explore the suburb of the future. A visionary master plan for nearly two-thirds of the Chattahoochee Hill Country will keep it from turning into another Gwinnett County by concentrating new construction into villages and hamlets, while preserving most of the land in its present delightful state. Homeowners are beginning to move into the first of these communities: charming Selborne, still under construction at Serenbe.

I toured the hamlet and then, at 4 o'clock, ambled over to the big old farmhouse where breakfast and afternoon tea are served. That's sweet tea, darlin', the house wine of the South. Actually, I poured a glass of lemonade and carried it out to the screened porch. Snacks were



laid out, including a piquant cheese spread with toasted pecans in place of your granny's diced pimento. A pillow-laden swinging daybed seduced me. Stretching out to watch a thunderstorm drag curtains of rain across the meadows, I dropped into a lovely sleep.

Selborne hamlet's commercial enterprises include a riding stable, Lowe Gallery artists Gail Foster and Thomas Swanston's own StudioSwan gallery, and the Blue-Eyed Daisy cafe, which serves three casual meals daily, with both indoor and courtyard seating. Other supper options for your Serenbe sojourn are 10 minutes away in Palmetto's town center, at Frank's Famous Family Restaurant, or 20

minutes away in Newnan. There the choices include Sprayberry's Barbecue or, for something rather more ambitious, André's Off the Square. André has ideas about fried green tomatoes other than pairing them with blue cheese and red pepper coulis (yawn). He turns them into soup and also lays them beneath a blackened catfish filet with pecan brown butter. Unworldly but genuinely friendly service reaffirms that, sophisticated cooking and accommodations aside, you're still deep in Georgia, bless your heart.

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