

BY DIANNA STAMPFLER

# Breathing new life into Birch Lodge

Travelers once again are heading to the heart of the Upper Peninsula for rest and relaxation at the historic Birch Lodge on Trout Lake.

Designed by Dr. Edgar Ford and constructed by H. Emery as the Birch Lodge Hospital and Summer Resort Sanitarium (also known as the Trout Lake Sanitarium), the expansive 10,000-square-foot main building opened in 1912 following Ford's unexpected death. His wife Cornelia and their sons were only able to run the massive property themselves for three years before transferring the mortgage to the next in a series of owners.

In 2019, two couples who had never met and in fact were both trying to acquire the property joined forces to preserve Birch Lodge. These four individuals had one common goal — to welcome guests back to this unique and impressive resort (listed with both the National and State Registers of Historic Places).

Bob Kraemer, president of Birch Lodge and co-founder/principal of Detroit-based Kraemer Design Group, and his wife Maureen dedicated their time and experience to overhauling the main lodge into 12 elegant guest rooms (including four suites), and common areas like the lobby, dining room and bar. Jim



Listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, Birch Lodge offers cozy guest rooms (above) and common areas (below) where guests can shoot pool and enjoy refreshments.



Woodruff, who brings decades of boutique lodging experience to the table (including time at Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island and Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado), lives on the property with his wife Carol, managing the daily operations.

"Preserving this hospitality gem in Michigan's Upper Peninsula ensures travelers from near and far will experience a comfortable, historically inspired stay in a classic American-style resort, just as visitors have for decades,

with a few modern additions to elevate their time at the lodge," Bob Kraemer said. "This is a truly special place, and we hope to make new memories in the years to come."

The three-story, wood-framed lodge sits on a fieldstone foundation and boasts what Woodruff calls the "second-largest front porch in Michigan," stretching 100 feet and overlooking 1,200 feet of private beach on Trout Lake. The white clapboard siding is offset by a deep green roof and matching shutters remi-





Visitors enjoy Birch Lodge's quiet location on Trout Lake **(below)** by rocking on the porch or taking the boat out fishing. It's 50-seat restaurant is being updated **(right)**.



niscent of the early 20th-century style.

Historically preserved and adorned with the finest in luxury décor and amenities, each guest room has its own distinct design theme. One of the most unique is the Pet Deer Room, which pays tribute to a series of fawns who resided on the property and even were allowed inside the lodge in those early days.

An intimate 50-seat restaurant, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, is scheduled to open in 2020. Resort guests, locals and destination foodies will find seasonal and regionally sourced fare — including wild game — on the upscale U.P. menu. Off the lobby, the Birch Bar (circa 1945), begs one to belly up for a cold brew or craft cocktail while listening to tunes from the vintage jukebox or shooting a game of pool.

Adjacent to the main lodge, an authentic 1964 brick midcentury modern motel offers eight pet-friendly guest rooms, each with panoramic views of the lake. Every room is outfitted with retro-style décor and accessories like light fixtures (with USB ports), cocktail sets and alarm clocks reminiscent of the era.

"The excellent location gives a fairly unique

balance between being able to visit places, yet coming back to the beauty of the lake and surrounding nature," said Willem van Polen from Bovenkarspel, Netherlands, who vacationed in the Upper Peninsula last summer with his family. "The (motel) rooms are all in '60s style, but with all the luxury of the present day for kids who need their Wi-Fi."

Those looking to spend time exploring the local woods and waters can request a picnic to go, complete with snacks and beverages to be enjoyed after time on the trail or lake. At the end of the day, guests are invited to gather at the firepit for beverages and s'mores. Boat and kayak rentals also are included for guests.

The year-round resort sits on a picturesque 20-acre parcel and is surrounded by the 26-acre Anna Badgley – Little Trout Lake Nature

Preserve, owned by the Little Traverse Conservancy and named for the one-time owner who donated the original half-acre in 1991. Anna and her husband Cliff bought the property in 1952, operating it until her passing in 2006.

Walking the grounds of Birch Lodge ([birchlodge.com](http://birchlodge.com)) evokes a sense of calmness and serenity, likely why the site originally was chosen. And, just as it has for more than a century, the property delivers a rejuvenating experience where guests escape back into themselves for quiet reflection. After all, it is just what the doctor originally ordered. ≈

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