

CHECK IN/CHECK OUT

POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y.:
ALUMNAE HOUSE

THE BASICS Many colleges run small hotels. Some are reserved for official visitors; others are open to all comers. Cornell's Statler Hotel, with views of Lake Cayuga, and the U.C.L.A. Guest House, in a quiet corner of Westwood, are both great places where anyone can stay. Vassar's Alumnae House, which reopened last fall after an extensive renovation, is also open to the public. With a top price for a double of \$101, it makes a great base for exploring the Hudson Valley. Expect the foliage to be at its most colorful in mid- to late October.

THE LOCATION A block from Vassar's campus, in Poughkeepsie, Alumnae House is easy to get to by public transportation. Trains from Grand Central Terminal in New York take about an hour and 50 minutes to reach Poughkeepsie, and the views along the route are stunning. A taxi from Poughkeepsie station to Alumnae House is \$5 plus tip. Vassar has an intriguing collection of 19th- and 20th-century architecture. Among the best examples is the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, a museum designed by Cesar Pelli as a modern addition to a collegiate gothic building. Attractions in the area include Hyde Park, the home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Val-Kill, the home of Eleanor Roosevelt, both just north of Poughkeepsie. Dia: Beacon is 18 miles south. A small commercial section of Poughkeepsie, with a Mexican restaurant, a pool hall and a cozy bistro called the Beech Tree Grill, is about a block from the hotel.

THE BUILDING A Tudor-style mansion built in 1924; the renovation added an elevator and other conveniences, but didn't diminish the prewar old-money ambience. The dining room and the living room, flanking the entry, are baronial. There's also a library, a cozy room with an arched ceiling and lots of Vassarian yearbooks. Hallways are decorated with photographs and memorabilia (a quilt marking the 75th anniversary of Alumnae House includes this message from the class of '39: "Forever Under 40").

THE ROOMS Checking the emergency-exit map, I could see my room (No. 16) wasn't the hotel's largest, but it was still quite spacious, and it offered a handsome bay window. The queen-size bed was very comfortable. The décor is borderline dowdy — knitted white bedspread, cur-

tains with bright red flowers — but that's part of the charm.

THE BATHROOMS Smallish and definitely not spa-like. (No glass shower stall, no whirlpool tub.) But nice and neat and perfectly functional.

AMENITIES There's Wi-Fi throughout the building. There are no TV's in the rooms, but there is a TV lounge on the second floor. Main Course caterers of New Paltz provides a first-rate college meal plan. Breakfast, served in the main dining room, with its restored ceiling and dark wainscoting, is terrific, and the maximum price (for those who choose a made-to-order omelet) is \$9. Lunch is soups, salads and sandwiches — the most expensive item is about



Chris Ramirez for The New York Times

The lobby of the hotel. Poughkeepsie is a good departure point for exploring the Hudson Valley.

\$8 — in the handsome corner pub. For dinner, head to the pub again or walk down the hill to the very pleasant Beech Tree Grill. There is no room service.

THE CROWD Most of the people you meet have some connection to Vassar, coeducational since 1969. At breakfast, a member of the class of '62 (wearing a Susan B. Anthony T-shirt) and her husband, visiting from California, offered up tales of Meryl Streep, Jane Fonda and Jacqueline Onassis, all of whom attended Vassar.

THE BOTTOM LINE The most expensive rooms are \$101 double, \$90 single — tax included. Dormitory-style quarters, with shared baths, start at just \$40. If you always wanted to go to Vassar, but not pay the tuition, here's your chance.

Vassar Alumnae House, 161 College Avenue, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 12603; (845) 437-7100; www.aavc.vassar.edu/house/index.html.
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