

A Conversation With Robin Williams (page 84)

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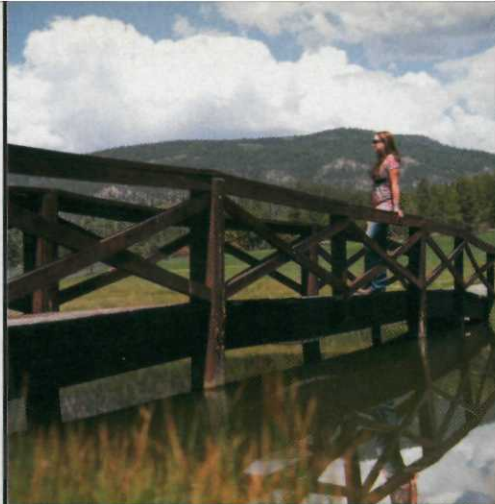
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THE GREAT SUMMER ESCAPE

Slow and Steady
Through Italy's
Piedmont Region





GO FORTH

KEYAH
GRANDE

Relaxation
and
rejuvenation
reach new
heights
at a
boutique
resort.

by
LIZ
SEYMOUR

photography by
JASON
DEWEY



It didn't seem possible, but I couldn't dispute my daughter's words. "It's true, Mom," Isabell said. "This will be the first time ever we've spent five whole days alone together, just the two of us." The rosy-red landscape of northern New Mexico

streamed past the rental-car windows; overhead, giant clouds stood like schooners in a clear blue sky. We were on our way to Keyah Grande, a pocket-sized hotel in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado, not far from Four Corners, where New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona meet. Opened in early 2005, Keyah Grande made the *Condé Nast Traveler* "Hot List"

for 2006 and was singled out by *Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report*, a widely respected newsletter of international travel. With its combination of attentive pampering (just eight guest rooms in the fully staffed 16,000-square-foot guest house) and wide-open spaces (4,000 acres of wooded mountains), Keyah Grande looked like the perfect place for our first-ever mother/

daughter retreat.

My daughter's cell phone rang. And rang again. The landscape progressed from mesas and gorges to hills and rivers, from red and brown to green and more green. We crossed the state line into Colorado. The straight road began to twist, and we went over the Continental Divide. Then, somewhere between Chromo and Pagosa Springs, the ringing ceased: We had passed out of cell phone range and were finally on vacation.



It was night when we finally reached the big iron gates with the gold "K" and "G" and began the climb through the velvety country darkness up the long private road toward the guesthouse.

We were startled by a floodlit bronze elk rearing up beside the road; a minute later, we were pulling into the forecourt of the guesthouse and shaking hands with the resort's managing director. The hotel has no reception desk, just a handsome foyer dominated by a wildly tendrilous glass sculpture by Dale Chihuly. As we were taken upstairs to our rooms, we learned that a light, late supper would be prepared

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for us (an amenity provided up until 10 p.m. for all late-arriving guests). It was a thoughtful touch that was indicative of just how much the staff at Keyah Grande excels at making guests — whatever their number — feel cared for without being smothered.

Our supper appeared in our room ten minutes later. Each of the eight Keyah Grande guest rooms is named for a different part of the world and decorated in vague homage to its namesake: Santa Fe, Spain, America, China, Japan, France, England. We were in a suite called South Pacific, which manifested itself in a carved-wood wall hanging over the fireplace, a giant painting of Balinese dancers, some faux bamboo lamps, and a stack of books with titles like *Island Style*, *Tropical Houses*, and *Life of Pi*. The non-South Pacific decor included a deep-green plush sofa, flowered pillows with tassel trim, big TVs in each of the two bedrooms and in the living room, fourposter beds with mattresses as soft as cream cheese, and casement windows that cranked open onto a wild and constantly changing valley landscape.

Keyah Grande is 7,500 feet above sea level (the staff made sure we had bottled water with us at all times in order to stay hydrated). At that oxygen-thin elevation, sunlight and shadow have a sharpness and an immediacy that affect one's whole sense of perspective. When I awoke the next morning and pulled back the curtains to look out the window, the long view down the valley looked as unreal as the picture on a jigsaw-puzzle box; it took a day or so for my town eyes to adjust to the sheer extent

of what I was seeing.

Manhattan real estate developers Alan and Barbara Sackman originally bought the 4,000-acre property that sits on the southern edge of the San Juan National Forest for family vacations. Avid hunters, they still own a private lodge out of sight of the guesthouse. During a quick tour, we were told that the Sackmans want guests to feel as though they are visiting friends when they are at Keyah Grande. And we certainly did over the next few days — except our friends back home don't normally leave artisanal chocolates on our pillows before we go to bed each night, stock their bathrooms with heavenly-smelling Bulgari shampoo, or take our muddy shoes away and clean them when we come in. We were looking for pampering in a setting that would also let us try some things we'd never done before. We found it.



About a week before we left home, I received an email questionnaire about what activities we'd like take part in during our stay (these are typically sent via snail mail). It was summer, so snowmobile touring and snowshoeing were out, and I knew that neither Isabell nor I had an interest in ATV touring or hunting. The spa treatment, on the other hand, was a definite. I hadn't been horseback riding in a long time, and it sounded like fun and a great way to spend some time in the beautiful landscape I saw on Keyah Grande's Web site. I was curious about fly-fishing,



so I checked it off too. Then I emailed the questionnaire to Isabell, who telephoned with a request.

"How about skeet shooting?"

"Skeet shooting?" I said

This wasn't what I had expected from my vegetarian daughter. I knew that a skeet wasn't an animal, but still....

"Have you ever shot a gun?" Isabell asked.

"No," I said.

"Well, neither have I. Come on Mom, this is our chance."

So I checked the box marked "Skeet, Trap Shooting, Sporting Clay Range."

A personal schedule lay on our desk. For our first day, we'd go horseback riding in the morning and enjoy a massage in the afternoon; the next day we'd be fly-fishing after breakfast and skeet shooting after lunch.

Horseback riding with Paul, the ranch manager and an LBJ look-alike and sound-alike, went just as I had hoped. Isabell and I had been on horses only sparingly, but the sure-footed Rebel and Remington were patient and responsive to our tentative tugs on the reins. Paul took us on an hour-long loop through meadows bright with asters, Canadian thistle, sunflowers, and alfalfa. A crane flew by; bluejays much brighter than their cousins back east darted across our path. We passed an area being cleared for a six-acre stocked lake and a little cabin where guests can hold cookouts and sit around a campfire.



Breakfast that morning — farm-fresh eggs scrambled and served on a bed of black

beans and roasted corn — was served in a small formal dining room wallpapered in a panorama of jungles and classical ruins. Our lunch table was set on the terrace under a big canvas umbrella: The server brought us a wedge of stuffed pizza and a braised red-cabbage salad, followed by organic pineapple and yogurt garnished with a sprinkle of pepper. Since we still had time before our 3 o'clock massages, we donned our bathing suits and went out to the hot tub — a pair of stair-stepped square pools, one spilling into the other. After a long soak Isabell went upstairs, and I walked to the flying deck, a dramatic half oval hanging over the valley. The wind in the trees sounded like surf; the shadows of the clouds moved with grace across the mountainsides.

The massage was perfect, a gentle but uncompromising combination of massage and acupressure that squeezed out whatever last bits of tension I had brought with me from the lower elevations. Afterwards I took a long bath in my whirlpool tub. Isabell and I dressed

for dinner side-by-side at the double vanity in my bathroom.

All dressed up, we sat outside on matching rockers, drinking glasses of wine beside the fire pit. The sky overhead was still pale blue, but the shadows all around us were lengthening; a rabbit made its way across the grass behind us. The chef came out and explained the menu that had been prepared for us (we had already decided we would suspend our vegetarianism during our stay). Meals are crafted from ingredients flown in from all over the country — butter from a two-cow farm in Vermont, cheeses from Boston and California, fresh organic vegetables from Ohio.

Our solitary table in the dining room was set with candles, Versace plates, and a grove of wineglasses etched with elk and pine trees. Personal menus, rolled up like diplomas, rested on our plates. The five-course meal stretched on for hours; each course was no more than eight or nine bites, but well worth lingering over — delicious little salmon rilletes resting under

How to Get There

US Airways offers service to both Durango, Colorado (about an hour's drive from Keyah Grande), and Albuquerque, New Mexico (about four hours). A courtesy pick-up is available from the Durango airport.

Things to Do

In addition to the fishing, hunting, and other on-site activities, you can go fishing, whitewater rafting, hot-air ballooning, and golfing, as well as take a mineral bath in the natural waters of Pagosa Springs. The staff will make arrangements. You can also visit archaeological sites at Chimney Rock and Mesa Verde.

For more info, visit keyahgrande.com. To directly book reservations, call 970.731.1160.

a little mound of passion fruit, hummus gnocchi that exploded gently on our tongues, a slice of Gorgonzola cheese resting in a puddle of port-wine vinegar and sprinkled with bright little candied tomatoes.

But if there were any plans for freshly caught trout on the next day's lunch menu, they would have to be revised: Paul was as gentle an instructor in fly-fishing as he was in horseback riding, but the fish just weren't biting. We had to make do with tuna and white-bean salad, fresh-baked bread, and homemade oatmeal cookies.

Then it was time for the skeet shooting — and let's just say neither of us channeled the spirit of Calamity Jane. We shot over, under, around, occasionally with the safety on, and once entirely in the wrong direction. The yellow shotgun shells piled up all around us, and still the bright orange disks continued to sail away unharmed. At one point our instructor Steve noticed that Isabell was keeping her left eye open and closing her right. He corrected that. I'm glad he didn't notice that most of the time both my eyes were shut. But however imperfectly we did it, still we *did* it.

And that was the best thing our trip to Keyah Grande could have done for us. We were well across the New Mexico state line the next day before Isabell's cell phone rang again. Something else that needed her attention had come up, but before she waded back into her demanding life I heard her say, "Let me tell you about this place where my mom and I just went...."

Liz Seymour writes for a variety of national publications.

