HAMPTONS SOCIAL

Cover by ELLEN VON UNWERTH

Sarah Wetenhall's Guide to Summer at The Hedges

BY LIZABETH ZINDEL WELLS

SARAH WETENHALL HAS A TALENT for giving historic properties new life while preserving their sense of place. At The Colony Hotel in Palm Beach, she created a world defined by color, character, and a signature style all her own. Now, she brings that same point of view to The Hedges Inn, one of East Hampton's most cherished landmarks.

Built in 1873 and set in the center of East Hampton, The Hedges sits close to the beach, shops, restaurants, and cultural institutions yet feels miles away from the summer crowds. Following its redesign and the return of Swifty's restaurant, the inn has begun a new chapter.

Here, Wetenhall shares her guide to summer at The Hedges, from breakfast on property and dinner at Swifty's to design details, beach walks, farm stands, and golden-hour evenings.

What makes a summer morning at The Hedges feel special?

SARAH WETENHALL: I think it's the combination of location, pace, and light. You're in the center of East Hampton, within walking distance of the beach, shops, restaurants, and cultural institutions, but The Hedges still feels tucked away. There's something special about a Hamptons morning — the quality of light near the water is remarkably beautiful.

Guests can wake up and decide whether they want a quiet morning on property, a beach walk, a day of exploring, or to settle in with a book and nowhere to be. We serve a killer breakfast at Swifty's: do yourself a favor and order the French toast. It's worth planning your morning around.

What are a few of your favorite details in the redesign of The Hedges that you hope guests notice?

SW: What I appreciate most about David Netto's approach is that he understood immediately that The Hedges already had a strong identity. The goal was to build upon what has made it such a beloved part of the village for generations while layering in new stories for guests to discover. The custom de Gournay mural in the parlor is certainly one of the standout moments. If guests look closely, they'll find subtle references to The Hedges, East Hampton's history, and even a few hidden nods that connect back to The Colony. I'm also obsessed with the antique American quilt-covered chair in the library. Another favorite detail is the wicker Society Social dining chairs, which perfectly capture the spirit of the redesign. A balance of tradition and modernity runs throughout the property and is one of the things I love most about what David created. The mix of antiques, vintage finds, custom pieces, and layered textures makes everything feel as though it has evolved naturally over time. David and the team created a design that honors the heritage of The Hedges while interpreting it in a way that feels current, inviting, and relevant. The entire property reveals itself gradually — there's always some beautiful detail or unexpected story waiting to be discovered on your next visit.

Photos by Greg Kessler.

What is the perfect Swifty's order for a first night in East Hampton?
SW: The food is genuinely extraordinary, and there isn't a bad choice on the menu. If it's available, I would absolutely start with the local tomato tart. It perfectly captures summer in the Hamptons and showcases what makes Swifty's so special: an incredible commitment to local sourcing. The same goes for the clambake for two, which feels quintessentially East Hampton and is one of the most memorable meals you can have during the season. What makes the food so exceptional is its connection to the local community. The menu highlights ingredients from some of the area's best farms and purveyors, including Mecox Farm, and that commitment to sourcing shows up on every plate. There's a freshness, quality, and authenticity that simply can't be replicated.

What makes Swifty's truly special is that the atmosphere lives up to the food. The room has an energy that's hard to find and even harder to create. On any given night, you'll find hotel guests, longtime East Hampton residents, summer regulars, and first-time visitors, all sitting side by side. The food, the service, and the atmosphere are all operating at the same level. By the end of the evening, it feels less like a restaurant and more like the living room of East Hampton.

What are your favorite tips for setting a summer table in the Hamptons, from flowers and linens to the details that make it feel personal?
SW: My biggest piece of advice is not to overthink it. The most memorable tables are usually the ones that feel collected and layered rather than perfectly coordinated. I think the best tables are built from a mix of old and new — beautiful linens paired with inherited pieces, vintage silver alongside contemporary tableware, and perhaps a few quirky majolica pieces that spark conversation. Start with a great foundation — a Schumacher tablecloth is always a good idea — then add tableware you love, whether it's beautiful place settings from Cabana or a set that's been in the family for generations. The pieces with a little history and personality are often the ones guests remember most. For flowers, I always lean toward something seasonal and a little loose. Lewis Miller can do no wrong, and I think arrangements look best when they feel as though they could have been gathered that morning rather than overly arranged. And when in doubt, add something from AERIN — a candlestick, votive, or beautiful serving piece. The tables I love most feel personal rather than perfect. They tell a story through the mix of objects, colors, and memories collected over time, and they never take themselves too seriously.

What are a few favorite places you recommend guests venture out to visit in the Hamptons during a stay at The Hedges?
SW: I always encourage guests to spend time exploring East Hampton itself before racing around trying to check every Hamptons destination off a list. One of the advantages of staying at The Hedges is that you're already in the middle of one of the most historic and charming villages on the East End. Guild Hall, Main Beach, and Clinton Academy or Mulford Farm are always at the top of my list. Just as importantly, I encourage visitors to leave time to experience the natural beauty that makes the Hamptons so special. Go for a paddleboard on a calm morning, take a hike through the Amagansett dunes, explore one of the many nature trails, or simply spend an afternoon by the water. The landscape here is every bit as remarkable as the restaurants, shops, and social scene. Most of all, leave room for spontaneity. Stop at a farm stand, wander into a shop you've never noticed before, or take a drive without a destination. Some of the best Hamptons experiences aren't the ones you meticulously plan, they're the ones you stumble upon.

The Hedges has such a distinct sense of style. Where did you look for inspiration for the redesign, and how have you cultivated your own aesthetic over the years?
SW: The inspiration was always East Hampton itself. The Hedges has been part of the fabric of the village since 1873, so we weren't interested in creating a hotel that could exist anywhere. We wanted every design decision to feel rooted in the history, architecture, landscape, and spirit of East Hampton while still feeling fresh and relevant for today's discerning guests. My aesthetic has been shaped by a love of places that feel authentic and connected to their communities. Whether it's The Colony in Palm Beach or The Hedges in East Hampton, I gravitate toward design that feels layered, collected, and full of personality rather than overly polished or trend-driven.

What is on your personal Hamptons summer bucket list this year?
SW: Last summer revolved around the opening of The Hedges, and this year, I'm looking forward to savoring it a bit more. One of my favorite things about being out East is that there's always something new to discover; every summer brings a few new restaurants, shops, and gathering places. I'm excited to try Babe's Diner in Sag Harbor, check out Dante on Shelter Island, and revisit a few old favorites. And of course, I'll never tire of those long golden-hour evenings and spectacular East End sunsets. No matter how many summers I've spent here, they never get old. More than anything, though, I'm looking forward to spending time with my family.
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Photos by Greg Kessler.