THE INFLUENCERS ISSUE
BOSTON’S NEW CLASS of HEAVYWEIGHTS

GEORGE FOREMAN III
PACKS A PUNCH

JOANNE CHANG
Bakes Up a Storm

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Boston’s King of Beer

THE ZIMMERMAN AGENCY
(continued)
Travel / Matt Martinelli

CALL THE BLUFF
A HIGH-END GETAWAY IN THE LOW COUNTRY

O ne by one, the birds flock to the lush green island in the center of a lagoon at Palmetto Bluff in South Carolina. If you observe for a few minutes, you'll see hundreds of seagulls descend upon this patch of paradise, each staking out a spot on the so-called Bird Island. These birds know what's up: You most certainly want to claim your spot at Montage Palmetto Bluff.

Located on 20,000 acres of preservation land between Hilton Head and Savannah, Georgia, Palmetto Bluff has a storied past, and a 21st-century development plan is bringing the once-dormant property to life again. Booming with new construction, the area includes two villages with shopping and dining as well as plenty of activities on land and water.

At the heart of the low country land sits Montage's main inn, created to match the Wilson Mansion, which burned to the ground on the same property in 1926. A few years after it was completed, rebuilt by developers and fresh off a $50 million expansion in 2016, it's only one option for guests, who can also stay at one of the cottages strung along the coast of the May River or in the guesthouses nestled along the internal lagoon.

Those guesthouses offer a more intimate stay at Montage Palmetto Bluff, with 8-14 units in each structure. Each room includes a deep-soaking tub, new slippers for you to relax in, and views of the lagoon. A ground-floor spot includes a furnished patio with two chairs that sport a glimpse of Bird Island. But there are many more ways to spend your time at Palmetto Bluff than seagull spying, so don't linger too long.

If you're in the mood for relaxation, the spa should be your first stop. The 13,000-square-foot space offers an array of beauty and wellness activities, from a 60-minute exfoliation and body wrap that uses seaweed and algae oils to a luxurious facial that relies on a caviar serum to soothe and restore your skin. Time in the steam and sauna rooms as well as a hot tub or cold plunge are offered to all spa customers, but consider the signature high-cotton massage as the best way to unwind. From the moment the rainstick sounds the start of the treatment, a calm is ushered in with hair and scalp treatments, warm-towel compresses for your feet and extra attention paid to each of your toes as part of the reflexology massage.

After your treatment, unfurl at the adjacent adults-only swimming pool, where attendants will wrap your towel tightly around your chaise lounge, pop open an umbrella for some much-needed shade and deliver food or drinks from the nearby all-ages pool bar. If you're interested in more adventurous seas, there are a slew of activities available on the
May River. Rent a paddleboard, kayak or canoe to explore on your own—perhaps even heading across to the natural sandbars during low tide to enjoy some beach time. Or take it easy with a trip on the resort’s 60-foot motor yacht, the Grace, which is one of three pre-World War I gas-powered yachts still in use. The Mimosas on the May is a 90-minute excursion along the river that allows visitors to experience the Grace while enjoying views of Hilton Head, snacking on fruit and pastry and, of course, sipping on mimosas.

Try to avoid filling up on the cruise as there are plenty of food and drink options in Palmetto Bluff. The newly renovated Octagon Porch in the main inn offers picturesque dinner entrees such as shrimp and grits with smoked tomato broth, bacon and stone-ground grits, plus a few local beers from Bluffton and the housemade artillery punch, which takes one week to prepare and is a twist on the two-centuries old Chatham Artillery Punch recipe. Step outside to the fire pit to enjoy an evening s’mores bar with flavored marshmallows ranging from strawberry to caramel swirl. Guests also gather around that same fire pit each day at 5 pm for complimentary snacks like grilled oysters.

For more libations, head toward the River House in Wilson Village, which formerly served as the property’s main inn. Manning the bar at the River House lounge is Guy, a favorite of local residents whose cocktail menu is full of more than a dozen inventive drinks like Amoxicillin—a twist on the Penicillin—made with Monkey Shoulder whisky, Laphroaig 10-year whisky, yellow Chartreuse, golden beet shrub and honey water. And if you’ve had too many stiff drinks, make a plan to nurse your hangover the next morning at the biscuit bar across the street inside Buffalo’s.

Don’t skip out on renting bikes, which will allow you to pedal your way through the car-free areas of Palmetto Bluff, observing the spoils of nature such as the lush oak trees with resurrection fern growing on their trunks. Explore the handful of main trails and eventually make your way down from Wilson Village—where most of the action is—to the newer Moreland Village. The second of three planned villages in Palmetto Bluff, Moreland feels a bit more coastal-chic with stained wood rather than the Antebellum setting of Wilson. When in Moreland, stop into Cole’s for the barbecue plate or a half-bucket of fried chicken served with red clay aioli. Adjacent to the restaurant is a large family pool as well as a game room, a bowling alley and a five-story treehouse for kids.

But your best bet for an activity to soak up the Southern life might be porching. If it’s a verb, you know it must be serious, and porching doesn’t disappoint. Slide into a rocking chair on the River House porch at 4 pm, sip on some sweet tea or lemonade, snack on a couple of housemade cookies and let the hour slip by. Porching happens daily at Montage Palmetto Bluff, and you’d be wise to return every day—just like those birds to Bird Island. ♦