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October 28, 2009 Watch Hill's Ocean House Reborn



by Bree Shirvell

Summers on the shore, black-tie affairs, decked out ballrooms—the glorious yellow hotel known as the Ocean House that gazed over Watch Hill, Rhode Island, for almost 150 years harkened back to an earlier time.

Six years after the original Ocean House, built in 1868, was torn down the new version will open this summer seeking to recreate that elegant era with a few modern touches—year round dining and accommodations, eco-friendly practices, farm to table dining, a spa, and an ocean view lap pool.

I grew up not far from the small seaside village of Watch Hill, and it's impossible to not think of the grand Ocean House Hotel when thinking about the village. It was the place you dreamed of attending a fancy party; the place you spent summers trying to sneak into the private beach.

Originally one of five hotels in town, the Ocean House was one of the last Victorian era hotels in mainland Rhode Island. In 2003 the hotel closed, and in 2004 when it became clear the Ocean House's historic structure couldn't be saved, it was torn down. The local community rallied together to save the site from development forming Bluff Avenue LLC with the goal of persevering both the site as a hotel and the Ocean House's 136 year history. The 2010 Ocean House hotel was built in the likeness of the old incorporating many of the original hotel features including the main fireplace, front desk, some wick furniture, and of course the yellow paint.

The Ocean House reopens this June under managing director Daniel Hosteller. While the five star, 49-room hotel will not start taking reservations until the end of October, every weekend from June to October is already booked for weddings. The Ocean House will include 23 private residences all with ocean views, 10 of which have already been sold.

I for one cannot wait for the place to reopen, for summers at the Ocean House to resume and for a new group of kids to dream about parties and try their hand at sneaking in; although, with more than 300 feet of beachfront open to the public, it shouldn't be as hard.

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