

Hospitality

An Idyllic Summer Vacation

An Interview with Mark and Gwenn Snider,
The Nantucket Hotel & Resort and Winnetu Oceanside Resort



View from the deck of the Winnetu Oceanside Resort (left);
The Nantucket Hotel & Resort (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Mark Snider is the son of a real estate developer and he grew up with a passion for transportation – mostly ships and ferries – fanned by childhood vacations on the Cape. In the early 1980s, at just 24 years of age, he bought a fleet of antique trains and started running the Cape Cod & Hyannis Railroad before switching to the hotel business.



Gwenn and Mark Snider

Gwenn Masterman

Snider received her B.A. from Brown University. She and her husband Mark have worked together since the 1980s when they ran the Cape Cod and Hyannis Railroad. Their next project was the creation of the Winnetu Oceanside Resort at South Beach on Martha's Vineyard, and they continued in the hotel business with the opening of The Nantucket Hotel in 2011. Gwenn is active in a number of nonprofits including acting as a board member of Facing History and Ourselves, the Pembroke Center at Brown University, and The Carroll School in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

PROPERTY BRIEF Nestled prominently in the heart of Nantucket, The Nantucket Hotel (thenantucket.com) is the Island's only premier, all-season destination hotel and resort. The Nantucket Hotel is located in town and within walking distance of beaches, shopping, restaurants, and the harbor. It is the Island's newest hotel and resort, having been completely renovated in 2012. While the exterior is classic Nantucket 1891, the interior is everything you would expect from a new hotel meeting the needs of today's travelers. The Nantucket Club, their brand-new, signature fitness and spa facility, offers yoga and fitness classes; two seasonal, heated swimming pools and an outdoor hot tub and saunas.

Winnetu Oceanside Resort (winnetu.com) is the quintessential Martha's Vineyard resort, named one of the "Best Beach Resorts for Foodies," by USA Today. The Winnetu Oceanside Resort is perfectly situated at South Beach in Edgartown. Family-owned, it consists of the main hotel with 1-4 bedroom suites, private cottages, surrounding 2-5 bedroom vacation home rentals, and Lure Grill, the Resort's ocean view restaurant. All guests enjoy the Resort's many complimentary amenities including a Children's Day Program; Parent/Toddler Program; tennis club; heated swimming pools; a fitness facility; fitness and yoga classes; shuttle transportation to/from Main Street, Edgartown; and concierge services.

Would you describe each of the properties you're involved with and are they marketed to a similar clientele?

Mark: They are remarkably similar but with nuances. The Vineyard property is on the beach, and we're the only beach destination on Martha's Vineyard, so that has great appeal. On Nantucket, we're in town, which is where people want

to be, and we're proximate to all the beaches.

The Nantucket Hotel is open year round and very busy during the summer season. Since we are located down town where everyone wants to be, we are also a popular destination from the fall through New Years. We also have events during the winter. The Vineyard hotel closes during the winter months because it's at the beach.

How important has it been to maintain the family feel when many in this industry have put such an emphasis on technology?

Gwenn: Because Mark and I experienced vacationing on these islands ourselves when our kids were little, we understand the allure of that idyllic summer vacation here with your family.

Part of what makes those memories so special are the simple things: It's the moment when people come together, not so much over the latest technology but over meals, moments on the beach, or bike rides. These islands are a place where those things perhaps happen more regularly than interfacing with the latest gadgetry. Even though we're not opposed to technology, we celebrate this notion of families simplifying their lives rather than complicating them with the things that sometimes separate us from the human moments.

How much have you focused on food and beverage?

Mark: Food is an opportunity to create an experience for people and, on the Vineyard, we have many different options. We have weekly clambakes, which are a major component of the resort because they help bring people together as part of a community. Most visitors wouldn't normally go out of their way to say hello to other guests, but at our clambakes, we see those people come together and get to know each other.

We have entertainment as well, and this also makes a visit with us special. We have fire pits in

both of our restaurants on both islands, and we try to create an environment where people come together, have fun and feel at home.

Gwenn: In our restaurants, we cater to weddings and corporate retreats, but also to guests in the hotels, so we work really hard to try to hit a delicious but accessible note. We would not call ourselves restaurateurs but we have a lot of experience trying to find the right formula to satisfy all of the constituencies that are there.

We also try to be local because people associate New England with lobster, fish, and oysters, so we try to incorporate those into our restaurant programs.

Is Nantucket truly a year-round destination?

Mark: When this incredible hotel was in foreclosure, we bought it and made a commitment to the community to be open throughout the year because there had not been a year-round hotel in Nantucket for a very long time. The community has been extraordinarily supportive and the winter is extremely busy.

From Thanksgiving to New Year's, Nantucket resembles a Norman Rockwell painting come to life. Festivities begin on Thanksgiving with the Turkey Plunge, which is a major event – Vice President Biden comes every year – where 1,000 people jump into the ocean in their bathing suits.

In our ballroom on Thanksgiving Day, we offer a grand buffet for 250 people and we have special showings at the Dreamland movie theater. Gwenn and I get to pick a movie each year and it draws hundreds of people.

There is the Christmas Stroll the following weekend and it's as busy as any weekend here in August. We have big holiday parties throughout December. We represent a wonderful one- or two-night getaway during the holiday break for people who aren't planning to go to the Caribbean.

We end the celebrations with a big Ball on New Year's, which Gwenn runs, and people really get into whatever theme we choose.

Nantucket is an amazing community and we're the only year-round hotel, so it has become hopefully ingrained in the minds of the locals that this is a place they can go in winter months. But there are also travelers that are seeking something not necessarily adventurous but are open to getting on a boat and coming to Nantucket in the winter. It's not a traditional cold-weather getaway so it engages a certain type of person. It's about turning around the notion of being locked into a place because you can't get out for the winter and trying to create programming within the hotel that shows how great things can be here. ●