



Bringing back what is precious is perhaps the theme of Putney, Vermont, as time and again, its people have come together to revive and preserve its most important pieces.

“Putney is a very interesting place,” says Mike Cosco, who bought the town’s storied General Store a couple of years back with his wife.

Having successfully run a small but vibrant general store just outside Boston, the Coscos were the perfect match to take on Putney’s, the oldest in the state. Before their arrival, the store had been run for several years by volunteers from the Historical Society, the organization that owns the building.

If any business could be called a labor of love, it would certainly be this one. In 2008, the store burned almost to the ground, and the owner didn’t have the funds to repair it. So, the Historical Society purchased and fully renovated it.

“That had been done with volunteers and grant money and all this local support,” Cosco says.

Then an arson burned it to the ground — again.

“A winter went by, and there’s no General Store, and it’s cold and dark. They just couldn’t believe that the store was gone,” Cosco says.

Until the town rallied once again under the mantra: “We are the General Store.”

It’s a line Cosco now has printed on his staff shirts because the story is so amazing.

“They just hitched up their britches again,” he says with a laugh.

They raised the money, got the volunteers, and built a brand-new building but with classic historic appeal.

“Knowing that story, I knew the town wouldn’t let us fail,” he says.

These days that makes the Putney General Store an anomaly. While others have closed their doors, the shop is thriving, selling

groceries, pizza, home-baked goods, hardware — you name it.

They didn’t close once throughout the pandemic, providing food, curbside pickup, and even home delivery to ensure people had what they needed.

“I think that experience between us, my employees, and the community kind of solidified the relationship,” Cosco says.

### Wine, maple syrup and a craft tour

Fall in Putney has been wildly busy with leaf peepers and families frequenting the exceptional Putney Central School, as well as two longstanding private educational institutions, the Greenwood School and Putney School, all nested within its bounds.

Fall is a time of excitement as students return to their learning on southern Vermont’s wooded trails, expansive playing fields, and community gardens, building a remarkable sense of self and place through the seasons.

This energy is felt throughout the General Store, which is hopping in autumn and now gearing up for the holidays. Upstairs is a new gift shop, Phoenix Gifts (named for the fire), and on the main floor, an impressive assortment of craft beers and carefully selected wines are well-stocked for patrons.

The Coscos are also eagerly awaiting the return of The Putney Craft Tour, the oldest, continuous tour of its kind in the country. It offers an immersive look into the lives of local artists who work in paper, clay, glass, wood, metal and more. Each year, they open their studio doors on Thanksgiving weekend and invite people in to learn about and purchase one-of-a-kind works of art just before the holidays.

“It’s a huge event that people come from miles and miles around to see,” Cosco says.

The Putney General Store is one of the weekend’s sponsors and acts as a central place for tour-goers to check in.

Nearby, Putney Mountain Winery will also serve as a hub.



Putney General Store's co-owner, Mike Cosco.

Hand crafted soaps at the Putney General Store



Putney Mountain Winery

## Putney, Vermont

Founded: 1753      Population: 2,702  
 County: Windham      Elevation: 404 feet  
 Land Acknowledgement:      Area: 26.8 square miles

- Pennacook
- Wabanaki (Dawnland Confederacy)
- Abenaki



“We will distribute maps so you can follow the artisan trail to visit 19 working studios,” says Kate Dodge, who owns the winery with her husband, Charles.

At Putney Mountain, visitors will be able to watch the winemaking process and talk with guest artist Clare Adams about her lovely painted glassworks. While there, they’ll have a chance to stock up on unique sips for the holiday season, like Simply Cranberry wine. Dodge describes it as “a beautiful deep red with a bright flavor and fresh tartness balanced by fruitiness.”

The winery’s award-winning Vermont Cassis is another popular holiday selection.

“This liqueur is a rich blend of black currants, blueberries and raspberries,” Dodge says. Add it to sparkling wine to make a Kir Royale. Or Dodge suggests, “For a delightful indulgence, blend it with our Simply Chocolate liqueur and add a dollop of heavy cream.”

As firm believers in preserving the region’s “working landscape,” opting for home-grown ingredients is the Dodge’s way of supporting local families, keeping profits in the community, and reducing their carbon footprint.

“The produce grown in this corner of New England has a history and agricultural continuity that relate to the land. So, what makes our wines special is ‘the taste of the place,’” says Dodge’s husband, Charles.

The winery is one of the sweet gems that makes Putney a surprisingly eclectic place to visit. But what would a Vermont trip be without also taking home some of the good stuff — maple syrup?

The owner of Hidden Springs Maple, Peter Cooper-Ellis, says the store is “a bit of a gathering place for families and friends in Putney.”

His family has been in the syrup business for over 50 years in a state that produces over two million gallons of maple syrup a year. In fact, Vermont is the largest producer in the U.S.

At Hidden Springs, you can enjoy a tasting and take home a quart for yourself or as a gift, along with an array of other maple items. The good news for non-locals — you can also buy syrup via their website if you need a fix from afar.

Though they sell nationally, Cooper-Ellis attributes much of Hidden Spring Maple’s success to its home.

“Putney is a highly community-oriented town. That makes it a great place to start a business,” he says.

In turn, his family has been able to support other local treasures, like Yellow Barn, an international center for chamber music, and the Next Stage Arts Project, a restored church and performance venue in the heart of Putney.

## The return of Santa’s Land brings more magic to Putney

At this time of year, there is another stop any Putney visitor must add to their list, beloved Santa’s Land, which has been enchanting families for more than 60 years. Closed briefly after multiple changes in ownership, it was rescued in 2017 by David Haversat.

