

BLACKBOOK

• A GLOBAL GUIDE FOR THE DISCERNING TRAVELLER •



Ellenborough Park in autumnal surrounds



Partridge in salt crust from The Wild Rabbit



Cosy fireside scene at The Wild Rabbit

THE COTSWOLDS CHARMS

COUNTRY ESCAPE

•••

Picturesque and steeped in history, the English region – just an hour or two from London – offers the best of Britain writ large.

By **Farhad Heydari**

LIKE THE BERKSHIRES, PROVENCE AND TUSCANY, the Cotswolds has long inspired poets, artists and authors alike, all of whom have rhapsodised about its picture-perfect villages, fecund farms and gently rolling hills – a remarkable, seductive and mostly unchanged rural idyll located just 160 kilometres from London. In the last couple of years, however, this

specially designated “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” – crisscrossed by limestone walls, winding streams and a lattice of walking trails and scenic roads – has begun garnering the attention of foodies, who come from near and far to dine on locally sourced fare in the many converted coaching inns, atmospheric gastropubs and smart restaurants that speckle the region. Add a pair ▶



of newly refurbished country-house hotels to this delectable mix, as well as a spa and a noted cooking school, and it's easy to see why more than a few cosmopolitan faces are now permanently calling its thatched or honey-hued cottages, not to mention sprawling piles, home.

GASTROPUB DELIGHTS

Paradoxically, the newest and latest addition to the region's growing roster of pubs is housed in a building that dates to 947AD, making it one of the oldest inns in Britain. Opened last September after a sizeable investment by new owners Brakspear Breweries, the Grade II-listed **Porch House** (porch-house.co.uk) in the eye-catching Georgian market town of Stow-on-the-Wold is a timeless wonder. Head chef Stephen Small purveys a regularly changing menu in a warren of low-ceilinged dining and drinking spaces consisting of restored fireplaces, exposed beams, flagstone floors and mix-and-match chairs, while upstairs 13 chintz-free en-suite bedrooms await those who wish to linger longer. Debuting virtually simultaneously with Porch House was the former Tollgate Inn, dating from 1750, which Carole Bamford of Daylesford Organic fame has given a wholesale makeover in the village of Kingham. **The Wild Rabbit** (thewildrabbit.co.uk), as it is now known, boasts a dozen

TO DO

The 16km drive on the B4077 from Toddington to Stow is one of the best and most scenic, regularly used as a backdrop for motoring photoshoots, with plenty of straights but also a few bends

Above: the 10th-century façade of Porch House; below left: Cheltenham's No 131's sitting room; below right: creamy moulles marinière on the stove at The Plough, Cold Aston

stylish rooms and the adept culinary handiwork of Adam Caisley, who, having trained at Le Gavroche, now utilises the mostly organic harvest of British farmers and artisan producers while dreaming up straightforward dishes like whole roast partridge in salt crust served with red cabbage and pommes coccote in a space with stone walls and open hearths. Across the village, Emily Watkins, who tenured at The Fat Duck, beckons gastronomes at her long-standing pub **The Kingham Plough** (thekinghamplough.co.uk), with seven petite rooms and a charming eatery featuring a seasonal Italianate menu to boot.

Just 16 kilometres away, **The Swan Inn** (theswanswinbrook.co.uk) in Swinbrook is equally attractive: the wisteria-clad structure is owned by Deborah Cavendish, the Duchess of Devonshire, whose olden family photographs adorn the tastefully decorated 11-key property, where fresh-cut flowers and open fires complement an ever-evolving menu. Over in the even quainter village of Filkins, the ivy-covered **Five Alls** (thefiveallsfilkins.co.uk) continues to win accolades

two years after opening with a quartet of accommodations. The handsome 18th-century stone building, with a commodious bar and three dining areas whose oak floorboards are draped with oriental carpets and whose walls are dressed with period portraits, comes courtesy of the husband-and-wife team of Sebastian and Lana Snow. Their daily changing menu of turf-to-table dishes is made using fresh, locally sourced produce and includes standouts like baked fillet of cod with chorizo, sprouting broccoli, fava beans, mussels and wild garlic leaves.

Another spousal team is also utilising that farm-fresh ethos. Sam and Georgina Pearman are the brains behind **The Wheatsheaf** (cotswoldswheatsheaf.com) in the market town of Northleach: a former coaching inn with a modernist streak and vestiges of period touches, it features 14 beautifully conceived quarters, some with freestanding baths that are very much of the moment, much like the cookery of Antony Ely, who heads up the kitchen with fuss-free concoctions like pan-fried pollock served with *petits pois à la Française*, radishes, pancetta and new potatoes. ▶



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: NIGEL CHAPMAN, JAKE EASTHAM, CHRIS TERRY



Bob Parkinson in the kitchen of his Cirencester eatery, *Made by Bob*

TO VISIT

As the name suggests, **Upton Smokery** in Burford specialises in smoked meat, game and fish. The family-run enterprise purveys a curated selection of comestibles, from cheese and chutneys to produce and pâtés. uptonsmokery.co.uk

Nearby in Cold Aston, another couple are receiving kudos for having given **The Plough** (coldastonplough.com) a much-needed onceover. Nick and Laura Avery purchased the formally forlorn 17th-century edifice in June 2012, reopening it to the delight of locals a year later with restored stonework, price-wise home-cooked cuisine and three cosy en-suite attic rooms. Few establishments in the region, though, can engender devotion like that which is showered on **The Chequers** (thechequerschurchill.com), a much-lauded tavern (also by the Pearmans) in the picturesque village of Churchill. Expect steaks, chops and other gastro classics from the Josper grill, craft brews (there are no fewer than

14 cask and keg beers on tap) and, like most every other hostelry in the area, plenty of pooches roaming the stylish candle-lit interiors – one which is very much en vogue with the local cognoscenti.

BEDDING DOWN IN STYLE

It was the inn-keeping duo of Brian Sack and Francis Coulson who, back in 1948, created the prototype of what has since become the English country-house hotel with their Lake District property **Sharrow Bay**. In the Cotswolds, much as elsewhere in the British Isles, there are now notable (and recently refurbished) examples, among them **Ellenborough Park** (ellenboroughpark.com). The stately Elizabethan manor house-turned-school-turned-hotel is rendered in stone and adorned with turrets, gargoyles, arches and towers. It recently underwent a three-year refurbishment, emerging with 62 individually decorated lodgings by Nina Campbell, an Indian-inspired spa and a rousing wood-panelled restaurant (as well as a brasserie) helmed by the talented Welshman David Kelman. It is located ideally on the doorstep to Cheltenham Racecourse, the

home of British steeplechasing. Another newbie is **Dormy House** (dormyhouse.co.uk) on the outskirts of picturesque Broadway. A former farmhouse dating to the 17th century, it features 40 guest rooms designed in florals by Emily Todhunter, a swish spa and a small gym plus a pair of restaurants, one more formal than the other. There are lovely touches throughout, including during checkout when a goodie bag with water, fruit and sweets is provided for the return journey home.

IN-TOWN EATING

The largest conurbations in the region are the towns of Cheltenham in the north and Cirencester in the south, both with a newish eatery of distinction. The former is a spa town where **No 131** (no131.com), a clubby restaurant and buzzy bar with 11 rooms in a listed Grade II Georgian villa and a menu that screams best of British, has become feted with locals, while the latter, a market town, is host to **Made by Bob** (foodmadebybob.com), an informal bistro and deli dreamed up by the former head chef at Bibendum, Bob Parkinson, whose homemade oeuvre is dished up from an open kitchen. ◀

EXCLUSIVELY YOURS

A selection of stately houses, grand manors and cosy cottages available for hire



LANGLEY PARK

The 13-bedroom Georgian mansion in 34 hectares of parkland sleeps up to 22. Among other accoutrements, it features a heated swimming pool, a tennis court and its very own private nightclub. luxurycotswoldrentals.co.uk



LOWER MILL ESTATE

This modernist residential development offers a bevy of self-catering properties, including a pair of six-bed villas, each sleeping 12. lowermillestate.com



PAINSWICK COURT

The one-time home of King Charles I, this commodious seven-bedroom pile can be hired exclusively by up to 14 people. Its Rococo Gardens, founded by Benjamin Hyett, are particularly attractive. akvillas.com



WATER MEADOW COTTAGE

Nestled among woodlands on a farm track on the legendary Blenheim Palace Estate, the two-bedroom holiday retreat dates from the 18th century and was once a hunting lodge. watermeadowcottage.co.uk