

# Britain's coolest new hotel

**Susan d'Arcy** has an exclusive first test of Endsleigh House, the latest country-house delight from Olga Polizzi

**H**otel Tresanton was the place that made Cornwall cooler than New York for a weekend away. Pre-Tresanton, the West Country was primarily known for clotted cream, the Wurzels and hotels that anyone under 70 or without a double-barrelled surname would rather chew off their right leg than visit. Post-Tresanton, you might be munching your crab sandwich alongside Madonna, Kate Winslet or 007 Brosnan.

The hotel's casual but elegant style paved the way for a string of design-conscious bolt holes, such as Babington House in Somerset and Cowley Manor in the Cotswolds, where the tea cups don't rattle uncontrollably should you dare appear without a jacket and tie. All of which goes some way to explaining why last week's arrival of Tresanton Mark Two — Hotel Endsleigh, on the edge of Dartmoor in Devon — is the most eagerly awaited opening of the year.

Tresanton never set out to be trendy, it was simply so unself-consciously glamorous that the accolades and the A-listers poured in. Having been the very first guest to spend a night at Endsleigh, I suspect the same will be true of its Devonian counterpart.

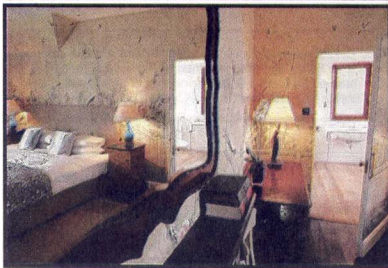
Let's start with what it doesn't have. It doesn't have a fancy spa, or a high-tech gym, or a private cinema, or a swimming pool — not even one without an infinity edge. Rooms don't have butler service or minibars — there isn't even room service. It's not wi-fi'd, or Bang & Olufsen'd or remote-controlled everything. "All that stuff's a bit silly, really," says Alex Polizzi, the general manager and daughter of the owner Olga Polizzi (sister of and style supreme for Rocco Forte). "I just want guests to eat and drink too much." Clearly, plenty intend



**Susan d'Arcy gamely volunteered to test the chaise longue and the champagne. Right, the Chinese bedroom**

to do precisely that. Without any pre-opening publicity, the 16 rooms are already almost sold out until October and the rest of the year is filling up nicely. Why wouldn't it? Apart from the formidable Polizzi connection, Endsleigh genuinely is that overused adjective: unique.

It was built in 1812 by Sir Jeffrey Wyatville, whose CV includes Chatsworth, for the sixth Duke of Bedford, and it features heart-stoppingly wonderful attention to detail: huge fireplaces with built-in stone seats, sun-drenched terraces supported by rose-clad tree trunks, sheep's-knuckle flooring, and chimneys positioned to ensure their smoke would rise in a beguiling pattern. It is Grade I-listed and one of the



country's last great Regency country houses.

But which room to take? Should I go for the Duchess's Room, with its cool blues, bedside tables with in-built chamber pots, and vast bathroom with original fittings; or Queen Victoria's Room, with the original hand-painted wallpaper, the very chaise longue the royal butt side-

The decor is deliberately simple because nothing can compete with the sublime views through those steeped-in-history mullioned windows. You can track the sweeps of the mighty, minty-green River Tamar as it scores out steeply wooded valleys on its relentless march to the English Channel. There's not a pylon or a hint of brick to spoil the panorama. Instead, Endsleigh is surrounded by 108 acres of the most romantic Grade I-listed gardens and woodlands, with shell houses for secret trysts and hidden glades for posh picnics made up by the kitchen.

Its modern British cuisine (illed pea-and-mint soup, succulent Dartmoor lamb with wilted greens, and scarlet-coloured summer pudding) is a cut above dinner at most of its rivals, and the wood-panelled dining room, lined with family crests, is suitably evocative. Service is charming,

but about 176 degrees from slick, so if you don't knit...

The only serious failing is the lack of evening ambience. The public rooms are spectacular in daylight (grand fireplaces, bold stripes, even bolder wallpapers), but could have been so much sexier after dark, with more thought to lighting, which is either too bright or too gloomy. But that's all I'm going to grumble about.

Historians were up in arms over plans to turn this place into a hotel. They wanted to preserve it for the nation. I'm afraid the nation's loss is most definitely the well-heeled weekenders' gain.

■ *Hotel Endsleigh* (01822 870000, [www.hotelendsleigh.com](http://www.hotelendsleigh.com)) has doubles from £210, including breakfast, rising to £350 for a suite. Expect to pay about £120 for a three-course dinner for two with a decent bottle of wine