

JOHN ALLEN



● **AMAZING PLACE:** Entrepreneur Olga Polizzi has bought Endsleigh House and plans to make it part of the hotel chain that runs from Cornwall to Italy

Grand plans for hidden retreat

AN HISTORIC Devon house overlooking the River Tamar has been bought by entrepreneur Olga Polizzi, who plans to turn it into an exclusive hotel.

Endsleigh House, a hidden retreat created for the Duke and Duchess of Bedford, is described as a fascinating example of Cottage Orné, surrounded by ornamental gardens with grottos, terraced walks, rock gardens, and an extensive historic arboretum.

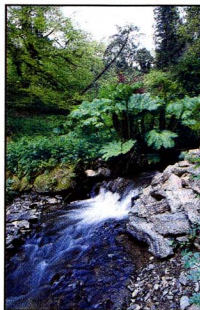
Mrs Polizzi, the daughter of Lord Forte, already owns the Tresanton Hotel in St Mawes and has been in negotiations for months over the £3 million deal. Endsleigh was built as a hunting lodge on the banks of the river Tamar, near Tavistock, for the 6th Duke of Bedford in the early years of the 19th century.

"It's an amazing place which my husband and I simply fell in love with when we first saw it," said Mrs Polizzi, wife of writer and broadcaster William Shawcross, whose late father was Attorney General Lord Shawcross. "Financially it will be quite a challenge but I am very happy to have done the deal and people in Devon have been very encouraging."

The news was greeted with delight by South West Tourism, whose deputy chief executive Robin Barker said: "Olga has a superb track record in creating top quality and stylish hotels which serve a very attractive market for the South West and we welcome her greater involvement in other establishments in the region."

In recent years, Endsleigh has been a private fishing lodge run by a syndicate of wealthy landowners but is run down and in need of restoration. Much of the original land and out-buildings have been taken over by the Landmark Trust and the grounds had been open to the public under an agreement with English Heritage

The daughter of the founder of the Forte hotel group has bought Endsleigh House, near Tavistock, reports John Kiddey



● **SCENIC:** The 'lost garden'

which gave a £500,000 grant for restoration work because the grounds are regarded as nationally important.

Set in its own 100 acres of gardens and fields, Endsleigh House will become a 15-roomed hotel aimed at the top end of the market: prices are expected to be between £200 and £250 per room per night and in exchange.

As part of the £3 million deal, Mrs Polizzi has agreed to pay back the gift of £500,000 from English Heritage.

Mrs Polizzi's daughter Alex will run the hotel and is looking forward to moving in. "We want to keep the cosy

country house feel of Endsleigh," she said. "I hope to use some of the original colour schemes which Georgiana, Duchess of Bedford, chose when the house was first built in the 19th century."

Mrs Polizzi wants to buy produce for the hotel restaurant locally and promises a menu which will be traditional and English in taste.

"Fresh local produce is so important," said Alex. "I want our guests to enjoy hearty soups, local game and favourite pies."

The impact of Endsleigh on the local economy is likely to be significant. Thirty jobs will be created directly in the hotel but the benefits will be felt more widely.

"At Tresanton we spend £100,000 a year on meat and the same on fish," said Mrs Polizzi. "And our guests will want to explore the wonderful countryside around Endsleigh so I would expect local pubs to benefit as well."

Olga Polizzi's only regret in buying Endsleigh is that much of the furniture in the house has been excluded from the sale and will be auctioned separately. "We are working to a budget on this project and we simply cannot afford to buy back at auction all the pieces which the vendors plan to put up for sale," she said.

Endsleigh becomes the latest in a chain of exclusive hotels run by Olga Polizzi and her brother Rosco Forte, extending from Cornwall to Italy.

"We hope to be open for customers by next spring," said Mrs Polizzi.

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A perfect location

ENDSLEIGH House was conceived as a country retreat by Georgiana, wife of the sixth Duke of Bedford, and built by the two great architects of the Regency period, Sir Jeffrey Wyattville and Humphry Repton.

Although the Duke of Bedford had large estates in Devon and Cornwall, the family did not have a family house in the Westcountry and, in 1809, Georgiana, the duke's second wife, found the perfect location for a shooting and fishing lodge on the banks of the Tamar.

Endsleigh is considered to be one

of the best examples where a building is designed to be part of the landscape in which it is set. In 1810, Georgiana and her four sons laid the foundation stone.

Built of Portland Stone and local timber, the two wings were joined by a curved terrace and laid out so that Georgiana, a "hands on mother" could see the children in their nursery and play garden from her study.

It is estimated that the project cost £120,000 (£4,000,000 in today's terms) and took eight years to build.