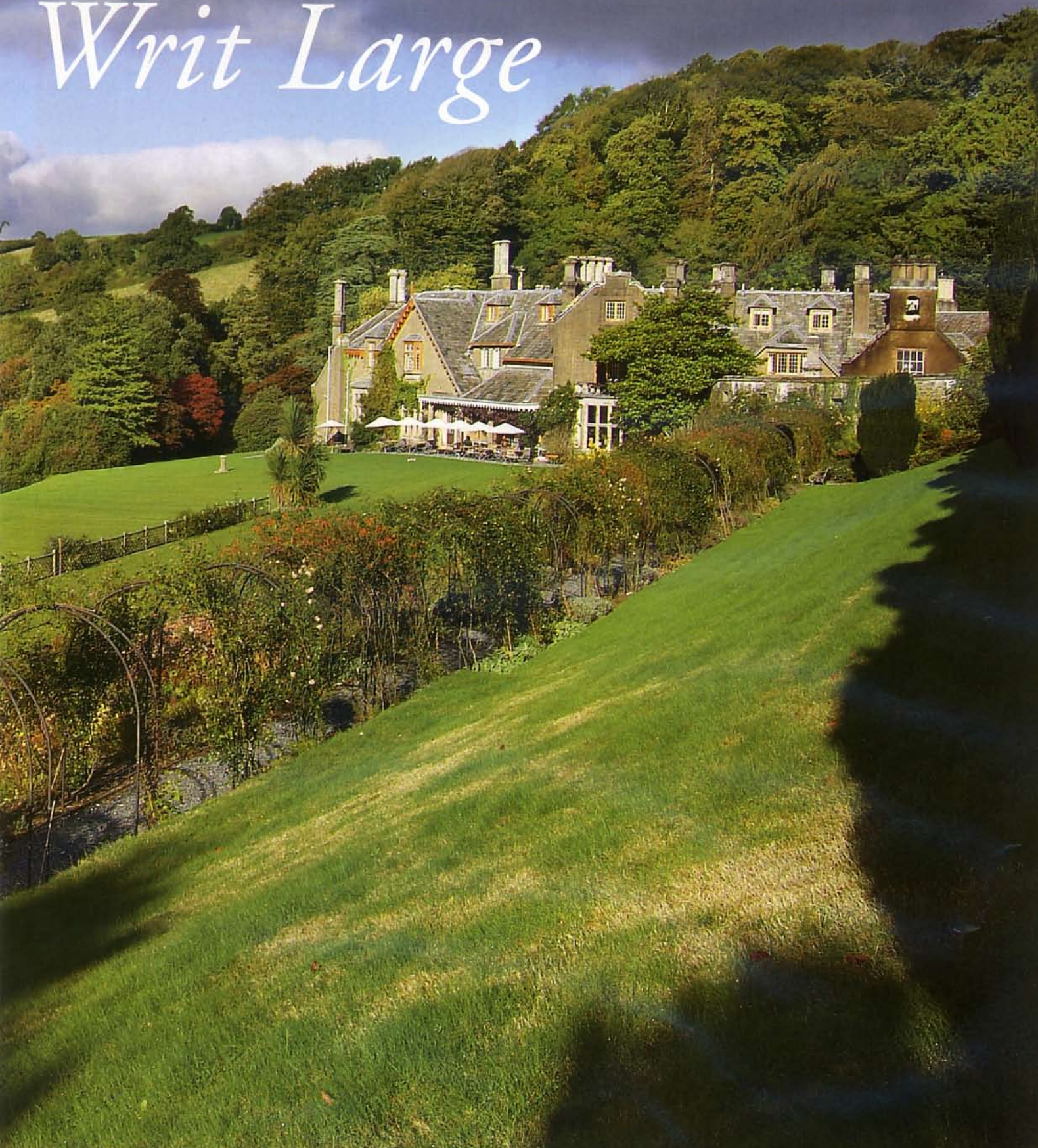


*A Country Cottage  
Writ Large*



## Malcolm Twigg visits a Regency aristocrat's holiday home

**O**ur first introduction to Hotel Endsleigh (formerly Endsleigh House), in border country just outside Launceston, is Georgina the miniature pot-bellied Vietnamese pig. House-trained and only 12 weeks old, she is a source of constant delight to the guests and an extravagant gesture of individuality on the part of Alex Polizzi, general manager and daughter of Olga Polizzi (of Forte Hotels and Tresanton Hotel fame).

Endsleigh is the latest in the chain of boutique hotels owned by the Polizzi family, and Alex runs the place as a home from home where guests can live the life that would have come as second nature to the aristocratic family who built it. You can appreciate why the Duke of Bedford chose this particular spot to build his summer home back in 1810, which he used just once a year as a hunting/fishing lodge, because it is staggeringly beautiful.

Built in *cottage-orné* style, it was designed by Jeffrey Wyattville (who was also the architect for Windsor Castle) and the gardens were created by Humphry Repton. Both house and garden are Grade 1 Listed and stayed within the Bedford family until the 1950s, until a double dose of death duties forced their sale. A number of the late Duke's cronies clubbed together to buy the estate to retain their fishing interest, eventually forming a charitable trust and, in so doing, ensured that Endsleigh House and its magnificent gardens would endure for posterity.

Ostensibly the house was run as a hotel during this period, but essentially it was little more than a private club run for the benefit of the members of the fishing syndicate. Now, probably for the first time ever in its history, with the sale to Olga Polizzi, it has come into the public domain, and both she and daughter Alex are keen to share its delights.

The ethos is to make guests feel as if they are part of a country house party, an image that has been faithfully perpetuated in the décor that Olga and Alex have created. With original dark panelling throughout, the house lends itself to subdued rural colours, with enlivening highlights, and furnishings have been put together in Olga Polizzi's preferred mix of old and new. "Mum and I both love stripes, which we have incorporated wherever we can, and which reflect the Regency period, and although my mother isn't a particularly floral person, the whole setting really demands that some floral theme should be included, which we have restricted to the bedrooms. The china was my own baby," she adds with an amount of justifiable pride. The inspiration came from Repton's garden just outside the windows here. "I had incredible fun picking out leaves and placing them on the blanks to create the effect I wanted."

The effect exemplifies the Polizzi style. Simple, uncluttered and, above all, understated. It was never the intention to create a Regency pastiche. Instead, the illusion has been given of a living ancient pile where furniture has been accumulated over the ages. It works magnificently: foxed mirrors reflect old armchairs renovated with modern fabrics, sea-grass carpets link both old and new with a neutral beneficence, and overall the atmosphere is one of gentle domesticity.

Brought up in a hotel empire, it was only natural that Alex would gravitate towards the business and she helped her mother at Tresanton for some years. At the moment she lives on site, in the former gatekeeper's lodge, "but in a small hotel like this (there are





## House and garden are integral to each other

only 15 rooms), where you are also part of the waiting staff, you have to get away from time to time, so I am looking for somewhere close to hand. I love Launceston – everyone is so friendly and I've met some really nice people."

I can appreciate the necessity to get away, but there is a part of me that asks why when you look through the windows at the immaculate vista. We are there when more guests arrive and are shown to their window table at lunchtime. The universal look is one, first, of awe then of privileged wonder, closely followed by sheer, unadulterated, joy. The beauty of the operation here is that non-residents are positively encouraged to visit the hotel and share in a splendour that has been hidden away for too long: the grounds are open to the public anyway (on payment at reception), but dining here also covers admission to the grounds.

Like the Tresanton, this is the sort of establishment where you expect to rub shoulders with A-list personalities, and prices do reflect that. However, for the value, the experience, the hospitality, and certainly the grounds, £27.50 per head for a magnificent three-course lunch seems a very reasonable proposition, if not as a regular feature, then for a special occasion – say, to celebrate the fact that there is a Thursday in the week... or even a Monday come to that. The chef, Nick Shopland specialises in modern English cuisine, using the freshest local ingredients, which complements the ethos of the place exactly and, with the main dining room featuring a frieze depicting the coats of arms of the Duke of Bedford and his fishing cronies, the link with the good life is complete.

Before lunch, Alex had shown us some of the suites and bedrooms. "We did retain some of the old furniture, but a lot of it was





far too expensive for us to consider buying – it was eventually sold for phenomenal sums at Christies." Each room is furnished and decorated uniquely whilst still complementing the Regency motif. In some of the rooms it wasn't even necessary to try, because the original hand-painted wallpaper is still in situ, as pristine as the day it was first put on the walls. The Duke's old bedroom features a bathroom approached down a short flight of stairs: it was, apparently, his private prayer room in the days when the place was built.

The gigantic beds in all of the bedrooms promise the best night's sleep you could imagine. That's part of the philosophy here. Buy the best linen, the nicest towels, the best bathware, give guests a really nice meal and allow them the luxury of the biggest and most comfortable beds you can afford, and they will go away relaxed and happy. Couple that with superb gardens and then it seems to me that, once the word gets out, the hotel can hardly fail to make an impact, economies of scale notwithstanding. (One of the famous Forte maxims is that any hotel with less than 30 bedrooms will struggle.) But most hotels with less than 30 bedrooms don't happen to have a Humphry Repton garden in the backyard, and you can't separate the house from the grounds; the two go together like hand and glove.

The house was created at the height of Regency fashion when natural landscape was being remoulded to perfection and classical grottoes, shell-houses and Arcadian buildings were being inserted into carefully contrived settings all over the landed gentry's estates throughout the country. Endsleigh House was a perfect example of this highly romanticised vision of the country lifestyle and, in fact, when Olga Polizzi bought the hotel, the present Duke of Bedford presented her with a facsimile copy of Repton's 'Red Book', containing the designs for the garden, which is now on permanent display in one of the rambling corridors on the ground floor.

The gardens themselves, which I believe to be the equal of any that the south coast of Cornwall can produce, are equally as tortuous. There is a new prospect in front of you around each corner; the shell house (approached via a long lawn outside the dining room set out for croquet) is probably the best example of its kind in the country for an estate of this size; and the rockery/grotto as good an example as I have seen anywhere. At night, flares illuminate the grounds outside the dining room mirroring the 180 tea lights throughout the ground floor rooms

that turn the interior into a scintillating display. "It takes us half-an-hour to light them all every night," Alex tells me.

We left Hotel Endsleigh feeling privileged to have been allowed sight of such an incredible piece of country house history, but we shouldn't have, because Endsleigh House is now back in the public domain. All you need is to pay the price of a good lunch or a cream tea, and not even that – a convivial drink in the lounge and a fiver to visit the gardens will suffice to chill you out. □

**See our luxury break competition on page 95.**



## Tresanton Hotel, St Mawes

Tresanton is the hotel that brought the famous Polizzi name to Cornwall. It is one of the Westcountry's most famous hotels, situated at the edge of the unspoiled village of St Mawes. All rooms have stunning views across the sea and look towards St Anthony's lighthouse.

Originally created in the 1940s as a yachtsmen's club, Tresanton is a cluster of old houses on different levels; in the 1950s and '60s it became one of the best-known and best-loved hotels in Cornwall.

In 1997 Olga Polizzi bought Tresanton and spent two years completely redesigning and restoring it, bringing her own personal style to a hotel which already had a formidable reputation. It has a casual and elegant atmosphere and is as much at home in its seaside location as Endsleigh House Hotel is in its secluded valley. The hotel is perfect as a romantic wedding venue, relaxing holiday location or luxury business and conference centre.



# Competition

Win a mid-week break at Hotel Endsleigh

If you liked what you saw in the 'Through the Keyhole' feature this issue (and who wouldn't?) there's an opportunity for *Cornwall Life* readers to experience it at first hand. Staying at Hotel Endsleigh is a treat at any time of the year, but during spring the gardens really come into their own. The creation of Humphry Repton, it was one of the last gardens he created before a carriage accident left him crippled, and it is widely recognised as being one of the most beautiful. Although Endsleigh was to be one of the last gardens that he designed, it was not the end of Repton's gardening ingenuity. He had difficulty moving around after his accident, being confined to a wheelchair, and that very fact led to yet another tool in the Repton armoury. He found that he could not bend down to pick or tend the flowers from his wheelchair, so he came up with the idea of the raised flower bed.

There may be no raised flower beds, as such, at Endsleigh but the gardens as a whole stand as a model for the typical Repton garden and what the country gentleman of the time wished to see on his estate, with grottos, shell houses, lakes and arcadian buildings creating an idyllic setting. And, when you've finished exploring the gardens, lunch or dinner in the luxuriously understated hotel that is the hallmark of the Polizzi name, will be an equally idyllic experience, as will sleeping in a room which would formerly have been occupied by landed gentry. Now, courtesy of Olga Polizzi and her daughter, Alex, one lucky couple will be having that opportunity this spring, just by answering one simple question. The luxury break will cover a mid-week overnight stay for a couple (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday), with champagne on arrival, and full English breakfast in the morning, overlooking the glorious valley setting of Hotel Endsleigh. Afterwards, if you haven't explored them the day before (or even if you have), you



will be free to marvel at Humphry Repton's garden creation and, although no other meals are included in the deal, who knows, you may even be tempted to stay on for the two- or three-course lunch and, possibly, afternoon tea as well? Or, you could make a real occasion of it and stay for a two- or three-course dinner in the evening. Doubtless you will be tempted back after experiencing this luxury break, because the restaurant is open to non-residents at all times. After years hidden away from the public, Endsleigh is truly back for everyone to share. □

**To find out more about Hotel Endsleigh visit [www.hotelendsleigh.com](http://www.hotelendsleigh.com). To contact the hotel direct to make reservations in the dining room or hotel, please call ☎01822 870000.**

To take advantage of this fabulous offer just answer this simple question:  
*For whom was Endsleigh House built in 1810?*

Send in your answer on a postcard, together with your name and address, to: Cornwall Life/Hotel Endsleigh Competition, Archant House, Babbage Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5JA. The first name to be drawn on the closing date, 31st March, 2006, will be deemed the winner. Normal competition rules apply.

PHOTOS: NEVILLE STANNIK