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Into the light

As *Poldark's* final series begins, the spotlight falls on what the stars will do next: Ellise Chappell reveals all

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REVIEW

WEEKEND IN *the country*

Spectacularly indulgent, a stay at this Buckinghamshire gem will indulge all of your country house fantasies, but in the most selfless manner possible

by Lucy Coles



During my blissful Sunday massage at Hartwell House it strikes me that although I'm indulging myself quite spectacularly this weekend, I am also 'putting something back'. You see, the hotel was donated to the National Trust in 2008, so all profits go to restoring it and other worthy country piles in need of TLC. It's a minibreak with a dash of sustainability – so 2019!

This is a proper country house hotel with impeccable staff. As you sweep up the drive towards the honey-stoned Georgian façade and step into the great hall, with its imposing portraits and huge fireplace, you feel you are arriving at your aristocratic aunt's place. You attempt to drink your first cup of tea more

elegantly than usual as a result. But this isn't a fusty place by any means. London is only an hour and a half away after all. An overheard coffee order of "skinny latte with half a shot of decaf" was accepted and delivered without so much as a raised eyebrow; breakfast includes the ubiquitous avocado on sourdough (though bacon and eggs seem more appropriate somehow). Our pre-dinner drinks are expertly mixed in the oak-panelled bar, which, somewhat ironically, used to serve as a prayer room. Dinner is perfect fillet steak in the flickering candlelight of a John Soanes-esque dining room.

Bedrooms are sumptuous – much drapery, ornaments and art – with every comfort, from

coffee machine to flat screen and a piping hot rain shower in the bathroom. Downstairs, the Rococo-style morning room and library offer expansive views over the 90-acre estate – designed by a Capability Brown contemporary. It's worth borrowing wellies to explore (especially if, like me, you arrive in cream ankle boots). A leisurely half hour stroll takes in the pavilions and monuments dotted around the park, including a pretty bridge over the lake – a piece of which was borrowed from the original Kew Bridge in the 19th century.

Inside the house, you'll want to eschew the lifts in favour of floating up and down the grand staircase, which is lined with rather startling carved wooden figures (if you look carefully, you'll spot Margaret Thatcher and Winston Churchill in the line-up).

Hartwell's particular charm is that it is not such a huge country estate that you couldn't at least imagine living here one day – joining a long line of illustrious inhabitants, from kings of England and France all the way through to the girls who boarded here when it was a finishing school up until the 1980s. Though hearing the complex story of renovations over the years, it feels best that the National Trust has taken it on. There has been a dwelling on this site for 1,000 years and with the passion of its current guardians, we can dare to hope it will still be here in another 1,000.

Bed and breakfast prices start from £240 per night, based on two sharing a classic room. Oxford Road, nr. Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP17 8NR (hartwell-house.com)

