

The M Collective

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Sir Richard FitzHerbert, the chairman of the Peak District & Derbyshire tourist board and owner of Tissington village ("it's a strange job"), isn't worried about attracting visitors to England's oldest national park. A good 18 million people live within 90 minutes' drive; last Sunday the usual day-trippers were queuing to cross Dovedale's picturesque stepping stones. What Sir Richard would like, however, is more people staying overnight. Unlike other honeypots, the Peaks aren't awash with accommodation, and certainly not the sort of modern-luxe digs you'd expect in the Lakes or the Cotswolds. So he is pleased that a new company, Wildhive, has arrived on his patch seeking to change that, starting with this month's opening of Callow Hall.

Built in the 1850s, the grade II listed, mullion-windowed house near Ashbourne (the "gateway to the Peaks") has been a hotel since the 1980s, but it had been so TLC-starved lately that it became a "distressed asset". In other words, a bargain. The founders of Wildhive, Ed Burrows and Charles Randall, snapped it up for £2 million, and in the past three years have spent £7 million transforming it with a flashy all-glass, living-roofed restaurant extension, contemporary interiors by Kit Kemp alumna Isabella Worsley and, up in the woods, a series of deluxe cabins – "hives" and "treehouses" – from the people who did the honours at Chewton Glen.

No amount of cash can elicit that shoulder-dropping "aah" on arrival at a hotel that just feels right. "Oh good," you think, "they get it." And Wildhive does. Relaxed staff waft you through the front door with its ceramic pots of brollies and walking sticks, past Summer Exhibition-style walls full of prints, across flagstone floors and into one of those "this is not a reception area" reception areas of deep sofas and where-can-I-get-one lamps.

Burrows, formerly at Barnsdale Lodge in Rutland, says he likes to "dehotelify" places, and has asked staff to treat guests like friends of friends – not too familiar, not too stiff. Goldlocks would approve.

Worsley worked with Kemp on hotels including Ham Yard, and her background shows in saturated colours and striking patterns, as much in the numerous public areas as in the house's 15 bedrooms.

Two of these are classed as Fabulous (more space, in-room bath, view-filled windows), five are Lovely and eight are Cosy. But proportions throughout tend to the generous, as do the complimentary snacks – the Kendal Mint Cake suggests they know you have brought your walking boots. Botanical smellies from 100 Acres and plantable pencils hint at Wildhive's eco aspirations. Luxuriously high beds are fitted with mattresses so comfortable mine actually fixed my bad back.

The hall's original features get their dues. High-back armchairs invite you to pause mid-staircase in the dramatically elongated oriel window. And the original owner's 17th-century tiles surround three fireplaces: in the snug lined with charity shop books, the board-games-and-pop-art sitting room and the private dining room, with its £17,000 worth of rural-mural bespoke wallpaper.

Pass through the non-reception reception area and down the steps that once led out of the house and these days you're in the bar-restaurant Garden Room. It would sound horribly *Ab Fab* of me to say the cocktails could be stronger and dinner portions smaller, so instead I'll applaud the chef David Bukowicki's dedication to snuffling out local produce: Dovedale blue cheese, Derbyshire beef, kitchen-garden greens, estate honey.

If you see the Garden Room only at night, though, you will have missed its star



PEAKY BLINDER

A new hotel on the edge of a national park offers woodland 'hives'. It's the bee's knees, says *Liz Edwards*



turn: the view of sheep-bobbled hills and dales that the general manager, Jeremy Whitworth, says puts a smile on his face every morning. He is very smiley.

Even without the view, breakfast is good – I liked the nutty Derbyshire oatcakes with the full English (£12) – but it would be even better if any of it were included in the room rate. Burrows says he doesn't want guests to feel short-changed if they lie in and miss breakfast – his "dehotelifying" idea. I say that charging £7 for a croissant is a bit rich when nipping to Pret isn't an option. I guess that wallpaper won't pay for itself.

The Garden Room's convincing-looking indoor olive trees and table-top herbs bring to mind the Pig hotels' botanical style. Burrows, who fizzes with ideas, says he admires Robin Hutson but insists he's "the opposite – Hutson has restaurateurs with rooms but Wildhive is somewhere to

find sanctuary. Yes, you want something to eat, but we're about the accommodation."

Ah yes, the accommodation. If you're not staying "in the house" you're staying "in the wild". For now this means one of four larch-clad "hives" in the woods (seven more will be finished early next year, along with two larger, self-catering "treehouses"). The ground is steep here and the cabins rest on Maldivian-style stilts; balconies brush the tree canopy. Out here among the sycamore leaves it feels easy to connect with nature. A citronella candle on the bistro table is there to stop nature connecting with you.

Inside, the hives are delightful, done out top to toe in sustainable pallet wood. Roomy but cosy. Secluded but well wi-fi-ed. Cute but not twee: hand-painted panels around windows and kitchenette cupboards have an Alpine-Himalayan feel. As in some house rooms, there's space for

Callow Hall, top and above, retains plenty of original features. Left and right, the "hives" offer a chance to connect with nature

a camp bed and dogs are welcome. Hives cost £20 more than a Fabulous room but come with a soundtrack of hooting owls.

You'll want a good book – these are hives of inactivity. But what about that Kendal Mint Cake? The coach house has been turned into an indoor-outdoor wellness centre. There are two treatment rooms and possibly the UK's finest manicure-table view; a yoga studio; a Technogym. But also an almost-finished map room, and bikes to borrow. Near by, you can join the Tissington Trail – an old railway line that's now a route into the national park. It runs 13 miles to Parsley Hay, but stop after six for Tissington's Elizabethan hall and Norman church. Sir Richard will be delighted to see you.

Liz Edwards was a guest of Callow Hall, which has room-only doubles from £169 (wildhive.uk)