

BOHÈME – A SECRET SANCTUARY OF STYLE

By Caroline Phillips



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Bohème. Does the very name conjure up thoughts of Puccini's opera? Well, think again. Because this Bohème is actually one of the loveliest self-catering houses in Somerset. Say the word, 'Bohème.' And imagine now a converted sixteenth century former cider mill turned drop-dead stylish, modern-rustic house. Say 'Bohème' and imagine instead a place that was also an erstwhile dairy farm and now blends original features with contemporary dash and comfort.



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I'm loath to divulge its whereabouts. It's one of those places I'd like to keep secret. It's just so perfect for everything from extended family occasions to hen shindigs and even office parties. Oh, all right...It's in Stawley – just over the Devon border – and set at the end of a long farm lane, midst 100 acres of green and pleasant land. A place so peaceful you can hear a field mouse squeak. The stuff of which rural idylls are made.



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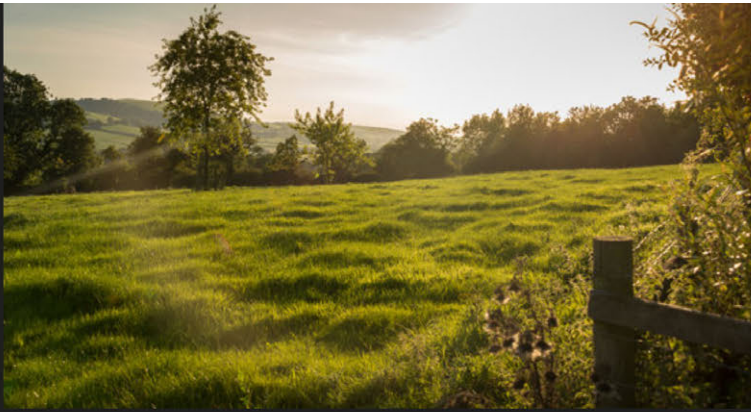


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My family and friends stride out into the fields with our Boxer – well-behaved dogs are welcome to stay – the winter sun smiling on our faces. We clamber over farm gates and see cotton-wool-fluffy lambs bleating and suckling. (For as far as we can walk, the estate belongs to PJ and Minky Luard, the delightful owners of Bohème). Later, we wander down the drive, this time to the River Tone – with its small waterfalls – and St Michael and All Angels, a church that dates from the 13th century.



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Back at the house, there's an indoor pool with picture window onto the rolling hills, a 25-metre kitchen/dining area with 20 red chairs surrounding a refectory table, acres of bleached wood floors and miles of under-floor heating, and a barn-size games room with pool table, comfy sofas and a wall for projecting movies from the snazziest bit of techie equipment.



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Then there are the ten double bedrooms: ones that have a kind of chalet vibe with their white-on-white and wood, including one known informally as 'the love nest.' (It's up a secret staircase, and is as private and comfortable as can be). Plus there's a pretty courtyard and, at the front of the house, views that put Heaven to shame.



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Most of the time we do nothing, bar the occasional lazy lap in the pool (it's heated to 86 degrees) and playing games of cards and Scrabble and sitting reading in front of a roaring log fire (in the coolest concrete, contemporary fireplace). Somerset cider plays a starring role. We take our indolence to new heights by having massage, reflexology and facial treatments from My Personal Sanctuary, mobile therapists who put the 'ah' into 'spa.'



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The therapists are tip-top and offer luxurious treatments. (MPS have a national network and offer their services in exclusive rental properties). There's something so gratifyingly slothful about being in a country house and padding around in a fluffy white dressing gown, popping onto a heated couch and having a Neal's Yard geranium back scrub before being slathered in lavender oil for a massage.



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In the evening, Sam Rom caters for us. He used to be the head chef at River Cottage. He

In the evening, Sam from catering for us, he used to be the head chef at Hotel Cottage. He specialises in culinary idiosyncrasies like squirrels on toast and wild boar porchetta in trotter stock. Nose to tail eating. 'I like the cuts that most people don't use,' he says cheerily. Afterwards, with full tummies and soaring hearts, my family and guests tumble into our comfortable beds and sleep round the clock.

Bohème. The opera's great. But the staycation? There's little to beat it.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about Bohème, click [here](#), or call +44(0) 1637 881183.

Caroline Phillips is an award-winning freelance journalist who contributes to publications from Sunday and daily newspapers to glossy magazines and various luxury websites. To see more of her work, go to www.carolinephillips.net.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEEK



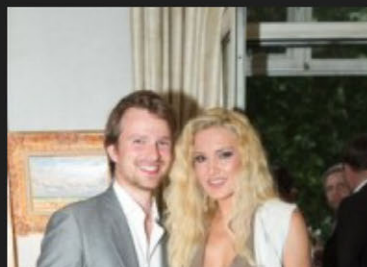
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