

ESCAPE TO BEAVERBROOK

By Caroline Phillips

It's a Grand Cru classé of a hotel. Its quality akin to vintage Dom Pérignon meets grade 5 Wagyu beef melded with Iranian Beluga. First division, first class and first-rate, in other words. Such words of undiluted praise are rare for me, and I've been reviewing five-star properties for 30 years.



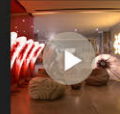
This is Beaverbrook, the luxury, country-estate hotel, spa and golf destination in the Surrey Hills, near Leatherhead, England. Until my BF and I arrived there, 'Leatherhead' just conjured up visions of rural suburbia. But despite being just 20 miles from London, the hotel enjoys an almost uninterrupted 18th century-style view: of the South Downs and the 470-acre Beaverbrook Estate.

Beaverbrook is the erstwhile home of Lord Beaverbrook, aka Max Aitken — politician (he served in both World War cabinets), press baron (he made The Daily Express the largest circulation newspaper in the world) and the man parodied as Lord Copper in Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*.



It's a late-Victorian mansion — Classical meets Italianate with a bit of French château. Here in Cherkley Court — as 'Beaverbrook' was previously known — Lord Beaverbrook hosted high society, literary giants and world leaders. So it's bursting with history although, according to staff, the resident ghost has left. Lady Beaverbrook outlived her husband by three decades (he was, after all, 31 years her senior); and after his passing, she reportedly lived mostly in her 'bedsit,' the now Dowager Suite. The mansion was unloved, the garden in ruins.

VIDEOS



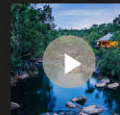
MILAN - DESIGNING OUR FUTURE

READ MORE



ROLLS-ROYCE BOAT TAIL

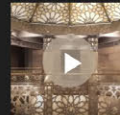
READ MORE



SHINTA MANI WILD

READ MORE

FEATURED CONTENT



BEIRUT WITH ANOUSKA HEMPEL

READ MORE

Beaverbrook opened late 2017, after a spend of £90 million and seven years. There's a Jean Cocteau painted glass window that Lord Beaverbrook installed. There's also the original cinema (at the time the UK's first private one) with its Art Deco wooden panelling and period wall lamps — but now also with a vintage-look popcorn maker and super comfy, beetroot corduroy armchairs and pouffes.



It's the room in which Lord Beaverbrook and his friend, Churchill, watched war newsreels when the former served as Churchill's Minister of Aircraft Production in the Second World War. The Spitfire was conceived in this house — Lord Beaverbrook was famous for his appeal to the public for pots and pans to make Spitfires — and its motif is replicated on silver pins on the lapels of the cricket-jumper-clad staff and on the walls of the hotel.

So what about the rest of the house? The décor is by Susie Atkinson of Soho and Babington House fame. There's an elegant morning room with plump sofas overlooking the Italianate garden; library with board games, roaring fire and tomes for or by previous guests, such as *British Intelligence in the Second World War*; plus a big hall with glass atrium, massive Gerhard Richter 'Patterns' tapestry and a grand piano scattered with framed photographs of Lord Beaverbrook, Cherkley Court and Winston Churchill.



It's time to mount the sweeping staircase, the wall of which is adorned with Brian Clarke's stained-glass spitfire paintings. The bedrooms and suites bear the names of illustrious people who've stayed here. They may not have slept up the drive in the reimagined Garden House (now a cosy place that also takes dogs) or in the former Coach House, but here in The House, well, that's another thing...

There's Noël Coward, Ian Fleming, Lady Diana Cooper, Bonar Law, Rudyard Kipling, Elizabeth Taylor, Neville Chamberlain, Jean Cocteau, Charlie Chaplin. Pause for awe. Then continue. David Lloyd George, Wallis Simpson, H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, Rebecca West, W. B. Yeats. Just 18 rooms. My favourite is Lady Diana Cooper's with its claw-foot bath and four-poster.





Our bedroom bears the names of Joe and Rose Kennedy. It's traditional with a twist — with lime fabric walls, a high chintz bedhead and glass chandelier. Plus a help-yourself bottle of Sipsmith sloe gin. There are books on the Kennedys and photos of 'Joe' (after using 'his' bedroom, I think I can call him that) with Chamberlain, plus Kennedy family pics. Our marble and mosaic bathroom has an open fire, early-edition Kipling books and Bamford toiletries of geranium and lavender.

We tear ourselves away only because we have a pasta lesson in the hotel's Cookery School, up the suitably long drive, in the Garden House: a place tucked away beside a private walled garden and with the vibe of (yet another, this one designed by Nicola Harding) charming private English country house. The class takes place in a demo kitchen — which is reached through the hotel's Italian restaurant kitchen — overlooking ancient trees and with a picture window for peeping into the professionals' kitchen.



The Cookery School at Beaverbrook (image courtesy of Dan Jones)

It's not obvious that chef Kaz Suzuki — Japanese, raised in New Zealand and now residing in England — should be a go-to person for teaching Italian cookery. But — as we make nuggets of homemade gnocchi and strips of pappardelle under his enthusiastic tutelage — it turns out that he is. If inspectors awarded Michelin stars for cookery lessons, he'd get one.

In the evening, the sound of jazz skips up the stairs to our bedroom. So we leave it again. This time for Sir Frank's Bar — a nod to the grand old man of advertising, Sir Frank Lowe, who has put his stamp on Beaverbrook by dreaming up its Spitfire theme — with its 1920s vibe, gilded birdcage, parquet floor and putty-pink walls. Its tasselled lamps and teal velvet bar stools. And 250 paintings by inveterate Victorian traveller, biologist and botanical artist, Marianne North.



The crowd is gay (in the original sense of the word) and chic. It's like being at a Flapper party, whilst being served spicy Japanese green peas for snacks. We also sip delicious mocktails of Virgin Kir Royale (blackberry purée, sparkling apple) and another made of hedgerow pickings, elderflower and the like.

Afterwards, we go to the Dining Room where Head Chef Taji Maruyama serves modern, pioneering Japanese cuisine. Instead of stark lighting and cool lines, the room is warm and traditional: think soft seating, sofas and a chandelier. As for the chef, he's ex Nobu, trained at Tokyo's Michelin-starred Kojyu, is big on Kappo (a multi-course meal selected entirely by the chef) and is also a fan of molecular gastronomy. The meal alone is worth the drive from London (or Manchester or Edinburgh).



I can't tell you about the dishes: the popcorn shrimp, the broccoli with kimchi, the rhubarb sorbet with lemon foam....because I'm busy today and I wouldn't be able to restrain myself from immediately jumping into my car to beetle back to Beaverbrook for a repeat meal. The same goes for the cactus-fed turbot, black cod, fatty tuna and Mochi ice-cream. Sorry.

After a sound night's sleep — even though our bedroom curtains let in a teensy bit too much light and it would be nice if the door from the adjoining suite were to close with the sound of one hand clapping — I have a pampering treatment. It takes place in the Coach House, previously used for Beaverbrook's Bentleys and now a spa. That's excellent too — see [here](#). And there's little Zen about the place, with its water-blue, fern-green and poppy-red tiles and golden-leaves-on-stained-glass skylights by Brian Clarke. Plus there's an indoor and outdoor pool and a hammam that's looks like a Zaha Hadid-designed space ship (but isn't).



I could go on and on about the wonders of Beaverbrook. About its staff who are professional and friendly (but not too familiar): the type who once glided solicitously around Annabel's and Harry's Bar tending guests' every whim, before such establishments were bling-ified. I could harp on about their uniforms: the 1920s waistcoats, braces, flat caps. And all about the house being dotted, welcomingly, at tea time with cake stands and (serve yourself) plates of flapjacks. But I'm not going to.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Address: Beaverbrook, Reigate Road, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 8QX

Tel: +44 (0)1372 571300

Price: Rooms at Beaverbrook start from £385 per night on a room only basis, inclusive of VAT.

Website: www.beaverbrook.co.uk

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



ESCAPE TO THE FOUR
SEASONS IN FLORENCE

[READ MORE](#)



INVESTING IN WINE

[READ MORE](#)



BUYERS' AGENT

[READ MORE](#)

THE
LUXURY
CHANNEL

THE NEWSLETTER

Escape, explore and discover our online magazine where you will find up-to-the-minute articles, news and trends on the most sophisticated and smartest goings-on in the world of luxury. We hope you enjoy the fascinating people and stories that can be found here on The Luxury Channel.

[SIGN UP TO THE NEWSLETTER](#)