



This Month — American West Ranches, London

# Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report<sup>®</sup>

A connoisseur's worldwide guide  
to peaceful and unspoiled places

Our 27th Year

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## Five Special Ranch Retreats in the Unspoiled American West

Every now and then we like to mosey around the American West in search of special vacation guest ranches for sophisticated outdoor enthusiasts. Our latest incognito foray yielded five distinctive and unique places that will appeal to those who enjoy horseback rides, hikes and/or fly-fishing in truly sublime surroundings. Enjoy!

### Smith Fork Ranch Crawford, Colorado

Tucked into a remote valley carved out by the turbulent Smith Fork of the Gunnison River, this timeless Rocky Mountain retreat is engulfed by several hundred thousand acres of scenic National Forests and protected wilderness (midway between Aspen and Telluride). Five years ago, Marley and Linda Hodgson unexpectedly came across the dilapidated 1890s enclave while they were in the process of selling their renowned Gurka leather goods business. Thanks to their fortitude and vision, Smith Fork has now been authentically rebuilt as a gracious and charmingly rustic ranch that evokes the Old West and a distant, more innocent age.

On arrival, we were instantly struck by the remarkable grandeur of the setting, the ranch being embraced by the snowcapped

peaks of the towering West Elk Mountains and the dramatically solitary 1,100-foot spire of Needle Rock. Tidy pathways and well-kept flowerbeds skirt the mellow timber structures, now lovingly restored and refurbished with full modern amenities.

A massive stone fireplace flanks the atmospheric lounge of the main lodge, the handsome room trimmed by plank floors, deep leather sofas, primitive Western antiques and a fine array of Native American artifacts. From the very beginning, the services of many talented artists and craftsmen were engaged for the restoration, so delightful details abound throughout the property. Local textiles, specially carved furnishings, handmade pottery, whimsical ironware and elk antler chandeliers have all been combined with exemplary taste and discrimination.

Accommodations consist of four separate cabins and a two-story log guest house with five bedrooms. All of the lodgings are admirably decorated and quite comfortable, though the cabins tend to offer more serenity and seclusion. One-bedroom "Spruce Cabin" sports exposed chinked log walls in a cozy living area with a gas-burning woodstove, a

queen-size bed topped by a down comforter, a small well-equipped bath with a walk-in slate-tiled shower, plus a private deck boasting a majestic view of looming Saddle Mountain. Two-bedroom (one bath) "Aspen" and "Oak" offer similar comforts and views for families. "River Cabin" is the largest of all and encompasses three bedrooms and three baths, the third room being ideal for children as it is actually a semi-enclosed loft with twin beds and bunks. Nestled near the bank of the rushing river a short stroll from the central compound, this cabin features a substantial log fireplace, screened porch and magical wraparound deck with a sunken hot tub.

Mornings begin in the Dinner Bell Cook House that has been stylishly appointed with leather and dappled cowhide. Here, the kitchen regularly complements its customary breakfast menu with specialties such as elk sausage patties with rich organic eggs and superlative corn cakes laden with fresh blueberries. Our hats are off to chef Patrick Walley for his artfully simple cuisine, which takes full advantage of the region's farm-fresh meat and produce. Dinner is an occasion of serious gastronomic intent, and in benign summer weather is served in a canvas-topped open-air pavilion. Dishes include superb local lamb and beef, as well as delicacies such as roast quail with cornbread stuffing and port-orange sauce, or sautéed trout fillets with a pumpkin-seed crust. The Hodgsons frequently dine alongside their guests, with Marley offering advice about an appropriate choice of wine from their extensive private cellar. Picnic lunches and cookouts supplement the lodge meals, and evenings usually conclude by the fireside with entertainment. During our stay, a wrangler from Argentina sang a repertoire of plaintive gaucho songs.

Most days are spent in the saddle on half-day and full-day rides through flower-strewn alpine meadows and along stunningly picturesque backcountry wilderness trails. Horses are carefully matched to a rider's skills, with instruction being available for inexperienced city slickers. Knowledgeable guides also stand by to accompany avid hikers who may wish to explore the ruggedly pristine surroundings, including nearby Black Canyon with its magnificent gorges and sweeping cliffs. This is a slice of heaven for anglers as well, with several casting ponds harboring rainbow trout up to eight pounds. In addition, friendly, professional guides can escort you to three miles of private beats along the crystal-clear, fast-flowing Smith Fork, which provides the ultimate challenge for the true fly-fishing connoisseur.

We loved the genuine Western spirit, timeless tranquility and rustic-cozy comforts of this ranch and would not hesitate to return. Indeed, this is a sensuous spot to kick back and savor some of nature's most invigorating scenic wonders. That said, demanding souls who require lavish marble baths, round-the-clock room service and high-speed Internet access

miss the point of a rejuvenating vacation here and should definitely look elsewhere.

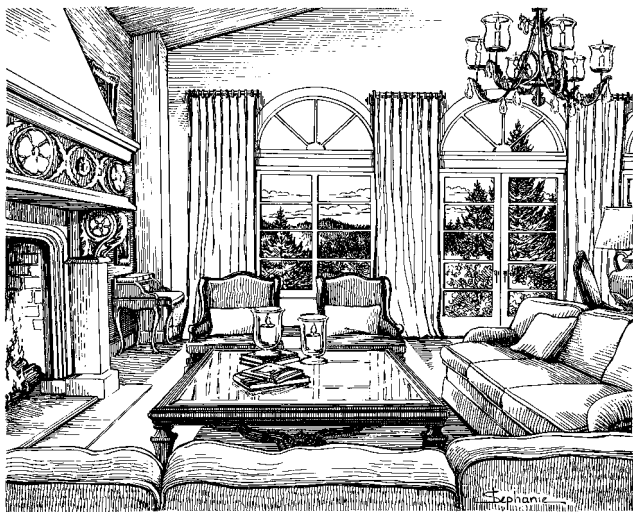
Guest House Room for two, \$2,550 (3 nights) and \$5,600 (7 nights), all meals, fly-fishing (as well as instructional clinics), guided hiking and horseback riding included; Spruce Cabin for two, \$2,550 (3 nights) and \$5,600 (7 nights); Oak Cabin for four, \$5,100 (3 nights) and \$11,200 (7 nights); River Cabin for six, \$7,800 (3 nights) and \$18,000 (7 nights). Open late May to mid-October with a 7-night minimum required Jun 20-Sep 4; 3-night minimum rest of season. Families welcome. Inquire about women-only cowgirl weekend Sep 29-Oct 2. Nearest airports are in Montrose (80 minutes) and Grand Junction, Aspen and Telluride (all approximately 2 hours away). **Contact:** Smith Fork Ranch, P.O. Box 401, Crawford, CO 81415. Tel. (970) 921-3454 or Fax (970) 921-3475. Email: [reservations@smithforkranch.com](mailto:reservations@smithforkranch.com)

## Keyah Grande Pagosa Springs, Colorado

This is the most atypical and eclectic "guest ranch" we have ever encountered. Nestled in southern Colorado's captivating San Juan Mountains (45 minutes east of Durango), newly opened Keyah Grande is a hideaway of extraordinary opulence, bearing more resemblance to a French chateau or Italian palazzo than to the customary Western farmstead. Access to the 4,000-acre estate is through an imposing stone-and-iron gateway, the long scenic drive wending up to a 7,000-foot hilltop that commands spellbinding vistas of the unspoiled forested mountainside from a spectacular flying deck cantilevered over a precipitous slope.

New Yorkers Alan and Barbara Sackman originally designed the rambling manor as a private getaway for family and friends, before revising and expanding their conception into an exclusive "guest house" of enormous distinction. A specially commissioned Chihuly wall sculpture in the foyer provides a hint of the cosmopolitan interior beyond, the baronial Great Room and formal dining room appointed with the owners' personal collection of splendid paintings and antique furniture.

Each of the eight sumptuous guest quarters has been decorated to evoke a specific region of the world, our favorite being "China," which flaunts a striking color scheme of celadon, splashed with expanses of canary yellow silk. All rooms feature queen beds, plush baths with whirlpool tubs, wet bars with ice machines and refrigerators, cable TVs with surround-sound audio, wireless Internet access and balconies affording glorious views of the scenic landscape. King beds are standard in "America" and the two suites, "Spain" and "South Pacific," the latter two accommodations augmented by separate fireplaced living rooms (but no balconies).



An excellent staff and two exceptionally talented chefs (the husband-and-wife team of Aki Kamoza and H. Alexander Talbot) further enhance the patrician ambience of the property. It would be no exaggeration to say that during our brief visit we enjoyed some of the finest, most imaginative and passionate cooking that we have experienced anywhere in the world. This is food for foodies (roasted duck ham with calamansi lime mustard fruit, foie gras dumplings and shiso-marcona almond pesto) relying for effect on innovative combinations of flavors and exquisite presentation in the manner of Thomas Keller, the über-chef of Napa's *French Laundry* and Manhattan's *Per Se*. A 3,000-bottle wine cellar complements the cuisine and may be browsed prior to dinner.

In-house diversions include a recreational lounge with billiards and card tables, and a sybaritic spa (exotic wraps, facials, massages) with a plunge pool designed around a structure reminiscent of a classic Roman villa. Hiking and horseback riding in the picturesque hills are also popular pursuits, along with shooting on a professional skeet and sporting clays range. In addition, two small estate ponds have been stocked with trout, though frankly these are likely to be of more interest to the chefs than to serious fly-fishing fans. Aside from being an unusual and indulgent place in which to unwind, Keyah Grande makes an outstanding venue to reserve in its entirety for family gatherings and corporate retreats, the lower level of the guest house encompassing a conference room outfitted with global state-of-the-art equipment.

Double, \$895-\$995, all meals included; Single, \$200 less. One-Bedroom Suite, \$1,195; Two-Bedroom Suite, \$1,395. No indoor smoking. The nearest commercial airport is in Durango (45 minutes); private aircraft can use Stevens Field in Pagosa Springs (15 minutes away). Contact: Keyah Grande, 13211 Highway 160 West, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147. Tel. (970) 731-1160 or Fax (970) 731-1162. Email: [guestservices@keyahgrande.com](mailto:guestservices@keyahgrande.com)

## South Fork Lodge Swan Valley, Idaho

Many knowledgeable anglers consider the tailwaters of the South Fork of the Snake River to be one of the world's premier dry-fly trout streams, especially from mid-August through mid-October. Crystalline cool waters, abundant hatches and prudent ecological regulations guarantee prolific counts of larger-than-average native cutthroats (anything less than 16" must be released), plus healthy browns weighing in from 5 to 10 pounds (the latest record being a 32-pounder!). Until recently, accommodations in this pristine pocket of southeast Idaho were motel-ish and mediocre at best. All that changed, however, with the opening of South Fork Lodge.

Set along a particularly picturesque bend of the South Fork in the unspoiled Swan Valley (a 75-minute drive from Jackson Hole, Wyoming), this riverside retreat raises rusticity to an impressive level for sophisticated fly-fishing enthusiasts who appreciate comfortable superior accommodations and first-rate food in casual surroundings of unusual distinction. Conservation-minded owner Mark Rockefeller (the son of the late New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and the nephew of legendary Rockresorts founder Laurance Rockefeller) purposely built the lodge with an architecturally charming design that echoes the region's rural landscape.

Great swaths of earthy cedar and pine define the farmhouse-style enclave, which is punctuated by zinc-banded silo-like structures that reflect the colors of the sky and embracing terrain. Inside the 12,500-square-foot lodge, massive timber columns and quartzite fireplaces frame the artistically crafted and generously proportioned public spaces. A relaxing deep-seated lounge, convivial *Card Room Bar* and visually striking domed dining hall afford beautiful panoramas of the swift-flowing river through towering wraparound picture windows that merge the inside and outside as one.

The extensive, seasonal-changing menu is exceptional for a down-home fishing lodge, with the accomplished chef producing delicious dishes such as smoked duck salad, medallions of elk with red currants, roast prime rib of pork with chutney and cranberries, Idaho trout *Véronique sautéed* in champagne butter, grilled lamb chops seasoned with mint basil oil, and more. A surprisingly well-balanced wine list and friendly, attentive staff further enhance the meals, as does the blissful riverfront stone terrace for fair-weather dining.

Eight of the 18 guest quarters are housed in a low-profile wing of the central building, though we personally prefer the 10 handsomely styled rooms and suites tucked into two separate cabin-like structures dotting the grounds. Hewn with exposed

log beams, these extra-spacious units feature large storage foyers, rock fireplaces, kitchenettes, dining tables and luxurious baths equipped with heated tile floors, whirlpool tubs, walk-in slate showers and lounging robes. Private covered balconies provide scenic vistas of the river and verdant landscape. “Cabin Suites” come augmented by glass-enclosed, furnished sunporches opening onto outside decks overlooking a stocked casting pond.

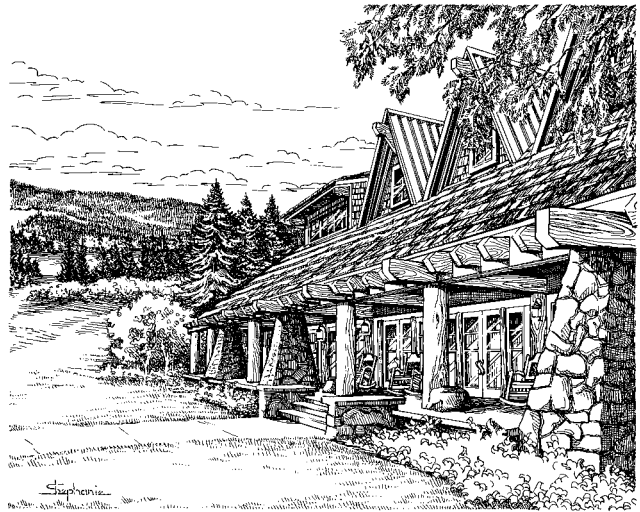
The lodge’s full-service fly and tackle shop is located next door and offers expert guide and outfitting services, as well as instruction for novices. Hiking trails abound in the area for non-anglers, the nearby canyons and mountains harboring a colorful variety of wildlife, from migrant songbirds and raptors (this is one of the largest roosts for bald eagles in the Northern Rockies) to elk, moose and mule deer. Horseback riding and whitewater rafting trips can also be arranged, and the shops and National Park sights of Jackson Hole are less than 90 minutes away.

Lodge Room for two, \$475, all meals included; Cabin Room, \$545. Single and suite rates on request. River House (3 bedrooms, 3 baths, living room, dining area, full kitchen, deck with hot tub), \$500, meals extra. Fly-fishing packages available. Nearest airports are in Idaho Falls (45 minutes) and Jackson Hole (75 minutes); rental car suggested. Contact: South Fork Lodge, P.O. Box 22, Swan Valley, ID 83449. Tel. (877) 347-4735 or Fax (208) 483-7007. Email: [reservations@southforklodge.com](mailto:reservations@southforklodge.com)

## The Lodge at Chama Chama, New Mexico

Set on a magnificent 36,000-acre private estate in the rugged San Juan Mountains of northern New Mexico (2 hours north of Santa Fe), this perennial favorite of ours provides an unexpectedly luxurious setting for trout-fishing aficionados and other outdoor sporting enthusiasts. The secluded sanctuary lies on the outskirts of the picturesque old frontier town of Chama, its unassuming gateway opening onto a rough dirt road that steadily winds up to an 8,000-foot high-country plateau. With each switchback, the grandeur of the view increases, until eventually the breathtaking panorama extends to a horizon bounded by distant jagged peaks that remain streaked with snow well into June. Thickets of scrub oak, aspen and spruce conceal substantial herds of elk and mule deer, the verdant landscape punctuated by 14 small alpine lakes gleaming sapphire-blue in the bright sunshine.

Immense unadorned wooden pillars support the imposing, 27,000-square-foot stone and timber lodge, which boasts two spectacular Great Rooms framed by towering cathedral ceilings and 20-foot-wide rock fireplaces. Original Western art and mounted trophies enhance the handsome masculine look of the interior décor, along with innumerable



photographs of beaming anglers clutching trout of improbable size. Deep leather armchairs, a fully stocked bar and piles of books further contribute to the warm, club-like atmosphere.

The property is owned by the local Jicarilla Apache people, who have recently added enhancements to the lodge, but have otherwise been content to entrust their acquisition to the affable longtime General Manager, Frank Simms. The convivial tone of the property clearly stems from senior management and we have nothing but praise for the unfailingly helpful, friendly and professional staff. During our latest incognito stay, the kitchen team seemed tenaciously determined to please, offering superior homestyle dishes such as stuffed quail, fresh sautéed trout and scrumptious elk stew.

The 21 spacious guest quarters are equally noteworthy and feature well-appointed baths and views of the unsullied mountain-backed terrain. We particularly recommend the four “Master Suites” with striking glass-backed fireplaces, separate sitting areas and doors that open onto attractive patios. Slip on a lounging robe and you can pad down the hallway to the lodge’s bright, nicely equipped exercise center and oversized whirlpool tub.

The most popular summer activity is trout fishing with Chama’s professional guides, either on one of the crystalline lakes, or along the clear, high-altitude stream known as the Rio Brazos. The fly-fishing for wild rainbow, brown, brook and cutthroat quickly gathers pace at the end of the June snowmelt, with dry flies (especially grasshopper patterns) being cast to individual feeding fish. Owing to the clarity of the lake water, it is also possible to cast to the cruising leviathan of your choice – a method that is demanding but extraordinarily exciting. As might be expected, the lake trout tend to be larger than those in the river, ranging from 16 to 28 inches, with many superbly conditioned fish in the 5- to 10-pound range. Daily guided activities for non-anglers are also offered,

including scenic hikes, wildlife viewing excursions, ranch tours and sporting clays.

Double, \$495 per person, all meals, complimentary bar and the guided activity of your choice included; add \$100 for a Master Suite. Inquire about the 3-day summer fly-fishing school held at the beginning of each month; autumn elk/mule deer hunting details on request. No children under age 12. The nearest commercial airport is in Albuquerque (3 hours away); private aircraft can use the airports in Santa Fe (2 hours) or Pagosa Springs, Colorado (90 minutes). Contact: The Lodge at Chama, P.O. Box 127, Chama, NM 87520. Tel. (505) 756-2133 or Fax (505) 756-2519. Email: [reservations@lodgeatchama.com](mailto:reservations@lodgeatchama.com)

## Cibolo Creek Ranch Big Bend, Texas

Talk about privacy and seclusion. Idyllic Cibolo Creek hunkers down amid 30,000 acres of dramatic scrubland plateaus, deep gorges, red mesas and rocky peaks in the southwest, middle-of-nowhere corner of Texas, near the Mexican border and Big Bend National Park. The nearest commercial airports are in El Paso and Midland/Odessa, a 3½- to 4-hour drive away, though the working ranch possesses a 5,300-foot paved airstrip for the private aircraft of high-powered CEOs and celebrities who occasionally escape here. A genuine Old West oasis fed by natural springs, the remarkable historic property sits at a 4,000-foot altitude, the crystal-clear air yielding cool year-round evenings and an awesome canopy of glittering stars that must be seen to be believed!

It was pioneer-fugitive Milton Faver who first discovered the vast spread back in 1849. A skosh over 5 feet in height, Favor was small by Texas standards, but his ambitions were as big as the surrounding terrain. After acquiring title to three springs, he constructed a trio of unique adobe forts to protect his 20,000 head of longhorn cattle from Apaches and rustlers. In 1889 he died, never knowing his legacy would be resurrected a century later by entrepreneur John Poindexter.

From a pile of ruins, the visionary Texas executive scrupulously recreated Cibolo from an historical perspective, his years of extensive research and authentic restoration undertaken with one goal in mind: if Milton Faver rose from the dead and again walked his ranch, he would feel right at home. Most experts agree that Poindexter's wish was achieved, his efforts garnering numerous awards, including three listings in the National Register of Historic Places.

All of the ranch's distinctive adobe structures and imposing forts have been rebuilt with an enormous attention to detail, from hand-tied ocotillo roofs down to the wood doors fastened with hand-forged brass latches. You enter the main compound of the largest

fort (El Cibolo) by way of a sheltered courtyard, the massive castle-like watchtower now housing a private museum containing Native American and pioneer artifacts uncovered during excavations. A charming hacienda has been built behind the fort, its engaging screened-in verandah opening into a welcoming fireplaced living room embellished by traditional cottonwood-beamed viga ceilings. Meals are served on the scenic covered porch or indoors near a roaring fire, the commendable Mexican-inspired menu highlighted by rich soups, hearty entrees (such as fresh venison, chile-glazed quail, buffalo steaks and sea bass) and tempting desserts.

Twenty handsome Spanish-flavored guest quarters occupy the El Cibolo compound, most of the units accented by king/queen beds draped in handstitched quilts, adobe corner fireplaces, Mexican folk art, old photographs and Saltillo tile floors scattered with cowskin throw rugs. None features a phone or TV. "Master Suite" is the prized lodging and comes augmented by a fireplaced living room, private verandah and plush bath with a whirlpool tub and walk-in shower. The main enclave also encompasses a beautiful outdoor pool/spa with picturesque mountain views, a spring-fed pond stocked with bass and perch, and a small workout room (with massages available on advance notice).

Two other historic forts on the ranch provide the most privacy from their vantage points 8 to 12 miles away. Accessed by gravel road, La Cienega houses four accommodations, a living/dining area and kitchen within the actual fort, plus a small heated pool. An additional seven rooms are available in an adjacent hacienda. Finally, a one-bedroom cottage flanks La Morita, the smallest and most secluded fort.

Daytime activities include exhilarating guided hikes and horseback rides into the colorful Chinati Mountains, skeet shooting and four-wheel-drive tours around the ranch, which is grazed by Texas longhorn cattle, buffalo and burro (though antelope, elk and mule deer are also prevalent). You should also visit Big Bend National Park cradled by the Rio Grande, its fascinating mountain and desert landscape being home to 450 species of birds. Spring is the prime time for viewing the flowering desert plants and legendary bird migrations in this protected virgin environment.

Milton Faver would be pleased with today's Cibolo Creek and so will you, if you're an adventuresome traveler seeking comfortable solitude and rugged scenery in a splendidly isolated and authentic pocket of the old American West. Deluxe Double, \$450, all meals included; Single on request. Master Suite, \$600. Any of the forts may be rented in their entirety for family reunions or small-group get-togethers. Contact: Cibolo Creek Ranch, HCR 67, Box 44, Marfa, TX 79843. Tel. (866) 496-9460 or (432) 229-3737. Fax (432) 229-3653. Email: [reservations@cibolocreekranch.com](mailto:reservations@cibolocreekranch.com)

## Life Goes On: Iain Harper's Special Report From London

All too often these days, we Harpers seem to find ourselves ensnared by world events, be it a coup, tsunami, or in this instance, the recent terrorist atrocity in London. I can tell you firsthand that in typically pragmatic British fashion, city residents are mad as hell and determined to get on with the natural order of life. Indeed, if the purpose of the al Qaeda fanatics was to create long-term anxiety and a climate of fear, then their cowardly bombings can only be deemed a pathetic failure. Despair is just not part of Britannia's genetic makeup, and like independent-minded New Yorkers, Londoners have found that resilience is the best defense against random lunacy.

Tunku Varadarajan summed it up nicely in the July 8 *de gustibus* column that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* – “The secret of British composure is that Britons really do feel proud of their civilization. On the whole, they apologize for very little, which is as it should be. Their message to terrorists is always likely to be straight and robust: How dare you! I'm British!” So in answer to those who might be considering postponing a trip to London, well, we can't possibly imagine why such a thought would even cross their minds. That said, here is our latest take on the vibrant city scene. . .

London has embraced modernity with ardor in recent years, displaying a curious new enthusiasm for contemporary art and architecture as exemplified by the Tate Modern Gallery and Renzo Piano's London Bridge Tower (an extraordinary 1,016-foot-high shard of glass that will soon dominate the South Bank of the Thames). Of course, traditional London is still alive and well in the fashionable arcades off Piccadilly, the elegant Nash terraces of Regent's Park and the exquisite garden squares of Kensington and Chelsea. Indeed, this is the “Old World” London that holds the most enduring appeal for many visitors, right down to staunchly English restaurants such as *Wilton's* on Jermyn Street and the charmingly civilized, convivial Stafford Hotel tucked away in an historic St. James's cul-de-sac.

Times move on, however, and even proper grandes dames like Claridge's and The Connaught have been forced to modernize and adapt in order to retain a demanding international clientele accustomed to the chic contemporary comforts provided by the Four Seasons and Mandarin Orientals of the world. We well remember the visceral shock experienced by some of our more conservative London friends when it was announced that The Connaught's hallowed restaurants were to be revamped. And worse, the hotel employed a chef who had the impertinence to be both young and female. But now, Angela Hartnett has earned a Michelin star for her light Mediterranean cuisine and calm has returned to Carlos Place – the compromise for traditionalists

being the Dover sole and bread pudding that are still served in *The Grill*.

### New London Hotels

A while ago we reviewed the strikingly modern One Aldwych Hotel, and slightly to our surprise numerous readers subsequently concurred with our favorable opinion. As a result, we decided to visit a few other contemporary boutique hotels on our latest London foray, though we firmly drew the line at modish celebrity haunts like The Sanderson and The Metropolitan that will never be our cup of tea. We started at the recently opened **Soho Hotel** located in the lively theatre district, just off Wardour Street (the epicenter of the Anglo-American film industry). The property is part of the Firmdale Hotels group, which is owned by energetic entrepreneurs Tim and Kit Kemp. Their string of intimate, stylish hotels includes The Pelham, a delightful South Kensington gem we have recommended for years.

Although the Soho area has been tidied up a great deal in recent times, it still remains an acquired taste, with visitors either extolling its gritty urban charm or hastening back to Mayfair and surroundings of more reassuring gentility. We had our doubts, but on arrival we could not have been welcomed more warmly by the reception staff, most of whom seemed to have stepped off a flight from Australia. Kit Kemp has decorated the public areas with considerable panache, the artworks, deep sofas and heavy fabrics in voluptuous colors creating an inviting and comfortably modern atmosphere. The 90 unusually spacious accommodations (several opening onto private terraces) are light and exceptionally well-appointed with large flat-screen TVs, DVD/CD players and reliable high-speed Internet access. State-of-the-art baths feature walk-in showers, sizable tubs and twin vanities. Room service also proved to be courteous and prompt, while housekeeping was notably thorough and efficient.

Downstairs, you will find a dramatically designed (if rather noisy) pewter-topped bar backed by a brightly colored mural, and an informal restaurant where chef Robin Read serves excellent modern international fare based on seasonal and organic products. Other facilities include a splendid fitness center, two beauty/massage treatment rooms and two large screening rooms for the convenience of movie people who clearly make up a significant portion of the clientele. This is a hotel that will appeal to more adventure-some city aficionados who wish to relax in comfort just a short stroll from the major theatres and many restaurants. Deluxe Double/Single, \$515, 17½% tax extra; Luxury Junior Suite, \$690; Penthouse Suite, \$1,390. Tel. (44) 20-7559-3000 or Fax (44) 20-7559-3003. Email: soho@firmdale.com

Our next stop was the newly refurbished and restored **Cadogan Hotel**, incorporating an elegant Edwardian building that was once the home of Lillie Langtry, the celebrated actress and mistress of King Edward VII. It enjoys an ideal Knightsbridge location on the corner of Sloane Street and Pont Street, a short walk from Harrods, Harvey Nichols and the fine boutiques that line pretty and idiosyncratic Walton Street. We had been looking forward to our stay, as the Cadogan is now under the aegis of Grace Leo-Andrieu, the owner of The Lancaster, one of our favorite Parisian sanctuaries. It became quickly apparent, however, that the hotel represented a classic instance of money being entirely devoted to décor, with seemingly no effort being expended on the recruitment of gracious and professional personnel. In fact, the rude and inept reception desk and generally sullen staff made us regret ever having set foot in the place.

Fortunately, we were more cordially received at **Knightsbridge Hotel**, an oasis of calm nestled along tranquil, tree-lined Beaufort Gardens, just a 2-minute stroll from Harrods. Another Firmdale property decorated by the inimitable Kit Kemp in congenial contemporary style, its intimate interior takes in a drawing room embellished with African artifacts, plus an utterly wonderful library enlivened by a sandstone fireplace and a select collection of modern British paintings and sculptures.

The 44 rooms and suites sport restful, neutral colors and come equipped with all of the expected modern amenities, from DVD/CD players, voice mail and high-speed Internet access to well-appointed and well-lit granite baths. Some accommodations are undeniably more spacious than others, Junior Suite #102 and Knightsbridge Suite #101 being particularly appealing. Deluxe Doubles are also extremely comfortable and represent a good luxury value for London. There is no on-premise restaurant, but the hotel does offer 24-hour room service and there are many enticing dining options within easy and safe walking distance. Deluxe Double, \$455, 17½% tax extra; Junior Suite, \$580; Knightsbridge Suite, \$735. Tel. (44) 20-7584-6300 or Fax (44) 20-7584-6355. Email: knightsbridge@firmdale.com

Good high-end values like the Knightsbridge are hard to come by in this excruciatingly expensive city, so we should point out that several of our longtime favorite London lodgings are currently offering Hideaway Report/Q Club members special preferred rates and GUARANTEED UPGRADES at the time of booking, from now until September 30. These properties include the sophisticated and elegantly renovated **Ritz** in St. James's, the recently redecorated and stylishly appointed 50-room **Pelham** in South Kensington, and the newly refurbished **Athenaeum Hotel & Apartments** tucked between St. James's and Hyde Park, the units here boasting separate

living rooms and fully equipped kitchenettes. For complete details, contact the Q Club office at (800) 375-4685, or go to [www.AndrewHarperTravel.com](http://www.AndrewHarperTravel.com) and click on "Special Travel Values."

### The London Restaurant Scene

London's real culinary story in recent times (despite what you may hear from 2012 Olympics sore loser, Jacques Chirac) has been the success of innovative young British chefs in redefining classic European traditions while adding to the repertoire of contemporary international styles. Formidable Gordon Ramsay is the most eminent of these pioneer gourmets, his eponymous Chelsea restaurant serving Michelin three-star French haute cuisine of the most elevated kind. Improbably, Ramsay's first career was as a professional soccer player and it has been observed more than once that the Glasgow Rangers' loss was London gastronomy's gain.

Nowadays, Ramsay's influence seems almost ubiquitous, with his protégés presiding over the restaurants at Claridge's (Mark Sergeant), The Connaught (Angela Hartnett) and The Berkeley (Marcus Wareing). Chefs, like dukes, seem to require a lineage and Ramsay's own mentor, Marco Pierre White, still oversees Michelin-starred *Mirabelle* on Curzon Street off Berkeley Square. Other London spots currently serving consistently superlative cuisine include Philip Howard's *The Square* in Mayfair, and *Tom Aikens* in Chelsea.

London has long been able to tout a number of scintillating dining establishments that are also fashionable social centers. For years, *Le Caprice* in St. James's and *The Ivy* and *J. Sheekey*, both in Covent Garden, were indelible entries in every successful Londoner's address book. Original owners Jeremy King and Chris Corbin recently sold all three to fashion tycoon Richard Caring, who must be enjoying a jolly good year, having also just paid \$235 million for the opulent Wentworth Golf Course in the suburbs. So far the standards of food and service have remained commendably high at this trio of restaurants, which is more than can be said for King and Corbin's new venture, *The Wolseley* on Piccadilly, a much-hyped English version of a Viennese café. We endured a rushed and mediocre meal here, made all the more forgettable by a poorly trained staff.

Although London has an encyclopedic range of ethnic restaurants, until recently it offered little Chinese food worthy of mention. Happily, Alan Yau's *Hakkasan* has now filled the void with exceptional Cantonese cuisine. Don't be put off by its location at the end of a scruffy alley, for it flaunts a glamorous interior by Christian Liagre. The French designer is also responsible for the stunning setting of Yau's latest venture, *Yauatcha*, a dim sum restaurant situated in a rather more appealing part of Soho.

## Reader Requests

Readers may send requests for vacation advice to: Editor, P.O. Box 50, Sun Valley, Idaho 83353 USA. Email: harper@AndrewHarperTravel.com

### Florence/Rome Tour Guide

**Q** Can you recommend a good English-speaking tour guide in Florence and Rome? G.M.

**A** Praised by many *Hideaway Report* readers, the knowledgeable and personable guides of **One Step Closer** offer fascinating insider tours of Florence, Rome and Tuscany. Tel. (055) 233-5283 or Fax (055) 233-5379. Email: mail@onestepcloser.net

### Worldwide Cooking School Vacations

**Q** Where can I obtain a list of vacation-oriented cooking schools in France and Italy? T.Y.

**A** The **2005 Guide to Cooking Schools** by ShawGuides provides informative descriptions of the best worldwide culinary courses, including more than 130 vacation cooking schools in France and Italy. To order a copy of this helpful reference guide, Tel. (212) 799-6464 or email info@shawguides.com

### Best U.S. Airport Hotel

**Q** Just out of curiosity, what is your favorite U.S. airport hotel? K.B.

**A** Admittedly, most airport lodgings tender me the excitement of a boiled turnip. That said, I was quite impressed with a recent overnight at the **Westin Detroit Metropolitan Airport Hotel**. Sporting a bold contemporary design, the sleek and stylish hotel adjoins the new McNamara Terminal. Tel. (888) 625-5144 or (248) 827-4000. Fax (248) 827-1364.

### Luxury Barge Cruising in France

**Q** Which first-class barges do you suggest for a cruise through Burgundy? F.S.

**A** There are many beautifully restored barges for leisurely cruising France's network of enchanting canals. Most can be chartered in their entirety, or booked by the cabin. Size-wise, they range from 6-passenger vessels such as the ultra-exclusive *Fleur de Lys* and delightfully charming *Le Papillion* to luxuriously appointed, 8-passenger barges like *La Bonne Amie* and *Le Bon Vivant*, on up to the grand 12-passenger *Napoleon*. Expect great food from your own personal chef, plus the frequent opportunity to wander ashore and explore colorful marketplaces, quaint medieval villages and secret vineyards most visitors never see. To determine the barge that is best for you, contact the well-informed **Elegant Journeys Department** at **Frontiers Travel**. Tel. (800) 245-1950 or (724) 935-1577. Email: info@frontierstravel.com

## Publisher's Announcement

### Andrew Harper's Q Club

Now you can enjoy special privileges and preferred rates at the world's most prestigious luxury hotels and hideaways through Andrew Harper's, members-only, boutique travel club.

As a loyal subscriber to *Hideaway Report*, you are prized by hotels for your appreciation of exceptional accommodations, personal service and fine cuisine. Indeed, Andrew Harper's Q Club provides you the kind of recognition that the best hotels lavish only on their most valued clients. But there's more. Q Club also guarantees you 10% to 40% savings off the normal published deluxe room and suite rates charged at nearly 300 U.S. and international luxury hotels. And as a member, you will receive our special bi-monthly Q Club newsletter describing ongoing seasonal specials that often include guaranteed room upgrades at the time of booking!

In addition, Q Club offers you helpful and savvy assistance with all your travel needs. Our full-service, in-house reservation service is staffed by 24 cordial Harper-trained professionals with more than 200 years of combined experience in luxury travel, each possessing inside contacts with Q Club-affiliated hotels and tour operators. Our staff can assist you in arranging everything, from cruises and safaris to high-end Scottish golf outings and Tuscan villa rentals. Exclusive, Harper-designed Signature Tours are available to exotic India, China, Peru and more. Plan your trips through Q Club and receive special added values and the peace-of-mind assurance of working through Andrew Harper.

You should receive your Q Club invitation next week. If it does not arrive by August 5, please phone us at (800) 375-4685, or go to [AndrewHarperTravel.com](http://AndrewHarperTravel.com) and click on "Q Club."

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