



The Glasshouse, a drawing room (owner Andy Murray's favourite), the Billiards Room, complete with pick 'n' mix sweets, just in case you are feeling peckish post dinner. Which you won't be, because the food here alone is a reason to visit.

Head chef Darin Campbell (formerly Head Chef at the two Michelin- starred Andrew Fairlie restaurant at Gleneagles) and his team have moved on from the more traditional French food of the past for a more modern menu, with lots of lighter options and international flavours. Favourites during my stay were a Vietnamese Broth starter, with coconut, noodles, a hint of chilli and sweetcorn fritter, plus a main of seared fillet of sea bass with Jersey Royals, rose harissa and langoustine sauce.

Kim Murray has been in the driving seat for the refurbishment, working alongside interior designer Suzanne Garuda to create a look that respects the building's history, while bringing it up-to-date, using bold botanical prints, rich, vibrant colours and some exciting paintings and prints. There's not a hint of tartan anywhere – although the staff do wear some rather stylish tweed (alongside short tan leather aprons in the restaurant).

**A**s I enter Cromlix House, I am welcomed first by neat rows of Hunter wellies, just waiting for willing walkers to step into them, then by the smiling duty manager, Ali. A reception area is an important part of a hotel, it being the first room a guest sees, and setting the tone for their whole stay. This is a good one – cosy and informal, with sofas and a fire for cooler days. It feels homely – albeit the home of a richer, more stylish friend perhaps. It even smells gorgeous, courtesy of the hotel's signature scent.

Cromlix House is a Victorian mansion, originally built as a private home for an aristocratic family. It has just 15 bedrooms and a lodge house, but it's sprawling, meaning plenty of space per guest – some of the suites are positively ballroom proportioned. There are also several public areas, including a bar (great cocktails), an airy restaurant,



Pictured above: Emma O'Reilly with Kim Murray. Photograph by Ruth McQuiggan

While Andy would be the first to admit that interior design isn't 'his thing' (we'll forgive you, Andy, as you're pretty good at something else!), he has a passion for art and has loaned part of his own collection to the walls of Cromlix, as has The Royal Scottish Academy. It's an interesting mix and includes works by Damien Hirst, David Shrigley, Ashley Cook, William McTaggart and Elizabeth Blackadder.

Bedrooms are luxurious – and it is good to see environmentally friendly amenities and heavenly toiletries from a small local company, MODM. There are well-equipped tea/coffee stations and a couple of homemade shortbread biscuits – recipe courtesy of Andy's gran!

However, a hotel is not just about its aesthetics. The staff and service are equally important and Cromlix really shines here, with workers who always have a smile on their faces and cannot do enough to help guests.

Outside the hotel there are 34 acres of grounds to roam, including woodland and a small loch. You will also find – no surprises here; a couple of tennis courts (Andy's mum Judy often runs courses) and an appetising-looking kitchen garden. Further afield, both Edinburgh and Glasgow are within an hour's drive. Closer still is Stirling, with its castle and National Wallace Monument; Bannockburn, and Dunblane, where Andy grew up.

Cromlix House can customise all sorts of activities for guests. Fancy an in-room spa treatment? When would you like it? Falconry in the grounds? No problem! We opt first for a foraging session in the woods with professional

forager Lauren Lochrie and head chef Darin Campbell. It is fascinating. We talk moss – the climate benefits of the sphagnum moss we see on the woodland floor, which absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and Old Man's Beard, hanging wispily from the trees, which has many medicinal applications. We find mushrooms – one a giant botulus, way past its best, another mushroom that nobody can identify but it looks 'suspicious' and we are told to leave well alone. Some girolles, found under a fallen branch, look good and go into a bag for us to enjoy for dinner that evening. We chew on spring needles from the Douglas Fir tree – apparently they are high in vitamin C and electrolytes. We find wild raspberries, still ripening, and Lauren has brought with her some ice lollies made from elderflower and the plantain herb.

Back inside, we create our own hand creams and muscle rubs, made with birch-infused oil and essential oils. Next, we do some flower arranging – and get a surprise visit from Kim who is at Cromlix for the day. She shows us how she likes to arrange blooms (in a posy, then put in a vase, rather than trying to arrange it straight into the vase, in case you're wondering). Kim starts with height in the middle, then foliage and shorter blooms built around.



Kim clearly has an eye for it. It's a treat to meet her. She is so likeable and down-to-earth.

At lunch, the restaurant is busy – Kim notes that they opened this place as much for the locals as anyone else and that Andy very much wants to give something back to his community. It seems to be working – who wouldn't like to have such a place on their doorstep? ♦

→ Prices from £310 per night; [pobhotels.com](http://pobhotels.com); [cromlix.com](http://cromlix.com)