

Sultry hues evoke a sensual mood in the bar at Cromlix where mixologists create signature cocktails infused with herbs and flowers from the kitchen garden

Escape CROMLIX

Andy Murray's boutique hotel has had a makeover that combines low-key luxury with a warm welcome

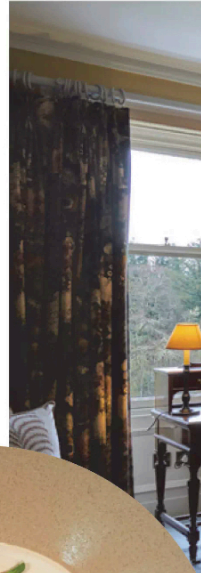
Photography Caroline Briggs Words Catherine Coyle

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he drive to Cromlix in the heart of Stirlingshire is an assault on the senses. The further from the motorway you venture, the louder the birdsong can be heard. Fields bristle with lush green life so perfect it appears like needlework stitched into the landscape. The crunch underfoot heralds your arrival at the plush five-star boutique hotel that, earlier this year, completed a significant remodel under the watchful eye of owners Kim and Andy Murray. Together with Belfast-based Studio Garuda Design, the couple have taken a decidedly personal approach to their treasured 15-bedroom hotel. For them, linking the indoor space with the incredible gardens outside was the key to unlocking Cromlix's potential. Add

in a lively restaurant led by executive head chef Darin Campbell, and an interior design scheme that oozes individual character, and this country house near Dunblane is a sensory playground.

The Murrays have owned Cromlix for more than a decade and wanted to restore not just the nuts and bolts of the place, but the character that had kept their family returning to the hotel for their own special celebrations year after year (they hosted their own wedding here in 2015). To do that, they had to take a hands-on approach, infusing the project with their own





[Above] Verbena is one of the hotel's deluxe suites, with furniture by Charlotte James and pieces rejuvenated by Abbey Upholstery. [Opposite] A pair of vanities is crucial for luxuriating in the bathroom. Botanical wallpaper by Osborne & Little connects the vibrancy indoors with the natural world beyond the windows. [Left] Seasonal produce sourced locally is a hallmark of chef Darin Campbell's menus

knowledge of the place, treating it with sensitivity, to elevate it beyond 'hotel' and offer guests a homely yet special ambience. Enter Suzanne Garuda. The interior designer had been working on another Scottish project when she was introduced to the family. "Kim and I immediately had a very easy relationship," recounts Suzanne. "It was a meeting of minds, and having that base to work from gave Kim the confidence to really put her design stamp on the hotel."

The marker of a successful interior, believes Suzanne, is when a place gives you a feeling that's hard to recreate anywhere else. Here, at Cromlix, that feeling is everywhere; it's found in the fragrance of sweetpeas that drifts in from the gardens, the warm glow that emanates from the Art Deco-esque bar, the eclectic melange of artworks that unobtrusively punctuate the public areas, even in the buttery handmade shortbread – baked to Andy's granny's secret recipe – that greets you on check in.

"The beauty of restoring somewhere old," says Suzanne, "is that you've already got all of the love and history that's been poured in. All we're doing is giving it a new life span. We've

exploited Cromlix's elements of Victorian architecture to make the place joyful again."

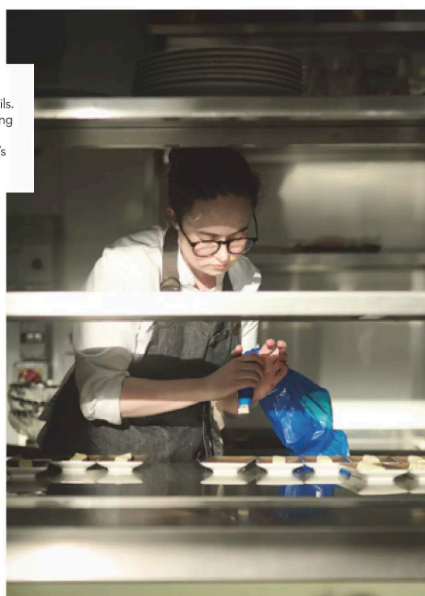
Kim recognised that the gardens were the focal point here and so the task was to integrate them into the interior. She and Suzanne worked together to weave a thread through the country house, while allowing a distinct character to evolve in each of the spaces. The reception area is atmospheric and cosy, with an open fire and mismatched chairs creating a laid-back first impression. Each of the bedrooms is named after a flower or plant grown in the grounds (Verbena was my elegant base for the weekend) and Suzanne was keenly aware that this personalisation had to be finely balanced. "Even if it appears like a riot of colour, if you look outside you'll see that it has been inspired by nature. We've made spaces to suit your mood."

Farrow & Ball's Sudbury Yellow and Oval Room Blue create a mellow backdrop, allowing Verbena's layered patterns and textures – GP&J Baker's upholstered headboard set against Osborne & Little curtains – to harmonise. Kim, who is a professional artist, was eager to have a collection of ▶

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[Below] Cromlix is surrounded by 34 acres of gardens and grounds. There are plans to extend and incorporate new cabins and wildlife trails. [Right] The Glasshouse serves a fine afternoon tea, while in the evening the open kitchen sets the mood with contemporary Scottish classics. [Bottom] The piano lounge has the warmth of a family living room – it's comfortable and welcoming, and encourages relaxation



Scottish art on display around the hotel, so she and Suzanne worked with the Royal Scottish Academy's art consultant Jane Lawrence to source originals works, prints and objets d'art that would bring the building to life. There are auction-house finds too, adding a further dimension to the sensory indulgence at Cromlix.

Dining is a casual affair in the Greenhouse where the napkins are starched but the atmosphere is light-hearted and easy. Menus are designed around the seasons and fresh produce from the gardens plays a central role. The bar – a glitzier space for cocktails and late-night chatter – is richly dressed in Hansel and Gretel-inspired botanical prints but still manages to adhere to the hotel's welcoming ethos, despite the change in mood.

Every surface is decked out with hand-picked flowers, delightful posies made daily from the garden's bountiful 34 acres, reminding visitors just how vibrant and invigorating this home-from-home really is. "I often work in the corporate world on commercial hotels that specify a cookie-cutter approach," explains Suzanne. "Working on Cromlix was the absolute antithesis of that."

Prices from £310, B&B; cromlix.com

