



# NETJETS

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## COTSWOLDS CATCH-UP

What's new, what's great and where to go in England's best getaway spot // By Simon Mills

**LONDON'S VERDANT** and increasingly vibrant answer to The Hamptons is a land of (organic almond) milk and honey-coloured stone, opalescent countryside scenery, cute cottages and fine hotels and destination dining that's home to a plethora of boldface names

(think: Jeremy Clarkson, Kate Moss, David Beckham, David Cameron and Boris Johnson), all of whom have decamped to this rarefied redoubt for R&R as well as the privacy it affords.

Officially, the area stretches across six counties but it is amid the motorway-

adjacent Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire Cotswolds – with their Instagram-worthy, farm-to-fork lunching opportunities, rolling hills, Hollywood villages and chocolate box-pretty towns like Burford, Chipping Norton, Charlbury, Bibury, Kingham, Great Tew, Moreton-in-Marsh – where all the rest, relaxation and retail action is.

Showrooming the area's remarkable recent transformation is the 17th-century **Aynho Park**

**STATELY JEWEL**  
Aynho Park is set in gardens by Capability Brown



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**MAKING HISTORY**  
Gary Friedman, CEO of RH, which has remodelled Aynho Park with spectacular results such as the library, *below*

(*rh.com*) at Banbury. Boasting a Capability Brown-landscaped, 30ha garden and notable Jacobean masonry, the house has recently reopened as the first British HQ for Californian furniture and design überbrand RH (formerly Restoration Hardware).

Sir John Soane’s grand design has been restyled as both an experiential store and restaurant – a “gallery” destination and RH’s first outside the US, one of a planned ten across Europe. Aynho Park is now an architectural wowser of a space that reimagines and redefines the furniture-shopping experience by curating the RH lifestyle as a series of artistic installations and multiple dining spaces that blur the lines between residential and retail, indoors and outdoors, home and hospitality. Think Conran megastore as envisaged by the *Downton Abbey* cast.

**Estelle Manor** (*estellemanor.com*), a few miles away, has similar grand-scale ambitions. The former Eynsham Hall, now the rural outpost of Mayfair members’ club Maison Estelle, has been converted into a hotel

and private members retreat with four restaurants, 108 bedrooms and a spectacular gym with a class studio and padel courts. Interior design – sumptuous, decadently camp and more Wodehouse than Soho House – is by New York-based Roman and Williams, the former movie set designers who have also created interiors for Ben Stiller, Kate Hudson and Gwyneth Paltrow. Estelle Manor’s showstopper promises to be its 3,000sq metre Roman-inspired bath house and spa which includes a bathing hall, five pools, a lounge, ten treatment rooms, thermal cabins and a bar. Expect to clock everyone from Princess Beatrice to Shiv Roy nursing a negroni by the tepidarium in one of the manor’s bathrobes.

Over at Daylesford Organic, 27km away in the Evenlode Valley (Locals refer



MARK SEELEN



© ESTELLE MANOR (?)



**COUNTRY HOME**  
Estelle Manor,  
the new outpost  
for a Mayfair  
members' club

to it as “the mothership”), the food and lifestyle superstore’s founder Carole Bamford has expanded the sprawling homestead and retail campus to now include **The Club by Bamford** ([bamfordclub.com](http://bamfordclub.com)). All pale woods and granite, with loft-style floor-to-ceiling windows, Bamford’s naturally lit rendering of a gym is

a bucolic antidote to the basement sweatboxes you might find in the city. Enjoy a session of reformer pilates or power yoga with a view of padel tennis courts and the rolling 1,400ha working farmland beyond. The Club even offers a farm-fit workout with bale lifting and tractor-tyre flipping. A 25m indoor pool is solid

stainless steel-lined (this material requiring the use of less chlorine, which is better for the hair), and adjacent is The Source with sauna, steam room, experience shower, ice barrels, indoor ice bath, outdoor infrared sauna and heated outdoor plunge pool. There’s also a club restaurant, B Well, serving a seasonal menu of food made from locally sourced ingredients, to encourage post-workout nourishment of the body “from the inside out”.

Retoxing Cotswolds-style mainly happens at its myriad public houses, which, confusingly, only seem to have one of three names – it is very easy to get one’s Bells, Bulls and Royal Oaks muddled up. Ergo, **The Bull** ([thebullcharlbury.com](http://thebullcharlbury.com)) at Charlbury is the most anticipated reopening of the year. Now under

the landlordship of local Oxfordshire boys James Gummer and Philip Winser – also of The Pelican on Notting Hill’s All Saints Road, and formerly of New York’s Fat Radish – the Wilderness festival town’s 16th-century boozier is now all bare wood beams, natural fabrics, tan leather and open fires with a menu that is both robust and warming: raw beef with Gentleman’s Relish, ham hock with egg mayo, spider crab toast et al.

Over the road is **The Bell** ([thebellatcharlbury.com](http://thebellatcharlbury.com)) – aka The Bell at Charlbury – a 13th-century coach house and market pub recently purchased by the ubiquitous Bamford (who also presides over The Fox at Oddington and The Wild Rabbit at

Kingham). Formerly a hangout for literary types – JRR Tolkien was once a regular – expect a Grade II-listed, English Heritage approved, upper-Middle Earth Bamford makeover when The Bell reopens in 2024. In the meantime, try **The Bell Inn** ([thebelllangford.com](http://thebelllangford.com)) at Langford, a small but excellent pub run by chef Tom Noest and manager Peter Creed, formerly of the famous Chequers in Churchill where *The Times* restaurant critic tried the kitchen’s garlic, parsley and bone marrow flatbread and declared it “not just the best mouthful of the year, but the best mouthful of my life”.

On the way back to the A40, pull the Aston in at **The Royal Oak** ([royaloakramsden.com](http://royaloakramsden.com)), a pub and boutique

hostelry at Ramsden owned by movie producer Tim Bevan and his artist wife Amy Gadney – both village residents – who commissioned a major make-over of the 17th-century interior by designer Nicola Harding back in 2020. Homely, warm and unpretentious, The Royal Oak is at once both traditional and contemporary, an outward-looking local with five boutique lodgings that feel like an overnight stay at an old friend’s house. Book the cute table in the bothy, outside on the sun-trapping rear terrace, with its own wood-burning stove, for a cosy Sunday lunch of Wychwood Venison Ragout and Oak ale. And keep an eye open for David Cameron, or Bridget Jones, at the bar.

## INN STYLE

The Royal Oak  
in Ramsden



ASHLEY COOMBS (2)