

The Gunton Arms, Norfolk

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The owners of this Norfolk pub and hotel had plenty of money to throw at their project, but even so they have created pretty much the perfect retreat, with prices and poshness kept in check. It's not really fair on other little hotels trying so hard to be stylish. The Gunton Arms shows what can be done if you're a millionaire art dealer with substantial funds to pour into a project, and spare pieces of modern art cluttering your cupboards.



The Gunton Arms lies in a 1,000-acre deer park in Norfolk.

The owners of this Norfolk retreat, which opened last autumn, are Ivor Braka, a rock'n'roll Chelsea art dealer specialising in Freud and Bacon who pops up in Tatler, and his wife Sarah Graham, a botanical artist. With all their taste, style and money (the owners bought so much excess furniture, they had to flog a load off ... through Christie's!), they have created what is pretty much the perfect country pub with rooms.

In a wow location, a 1,000-acre deer park tucked down a country lane off the road to Cromer, lends a grand, isolated country estate atmosphere, yet inside, we find the renovated pub cosy and not too posh at all. The decor is devoutly hip – Tracy Emin plates, a Gilbert and George, a Paula Rego of a woman vomiting – but this is still a proper pub, with deep red walls and decent ales on tap.

"Good man," says the barman, when my boyfriend orders our pints of Woodforde's Wherry. The families and regulars at oversized benches outside seem happy their local boozer's turned a bit special.

Inside, decorator and textiles collector Robert Kime has used Persian carpets, Uzbek ikats, Iranian upholstery and his own gouache wallpaper, complemented by antiques from London dealer Robert Young, to create a cool haven, global yet homely. I love it.

After cooing at all the bits and bobs (apart from the framed tarantulas) we head to the flagstoned dining

room, where head chef is Stuart Tattersall, poached from Mark Hix. He uses the room's centrepiece, a massive 16th-century French open fireplace, to theatrically grill giant Flintstones-esque steaks, and our eyes slide constantly between him and some elk antlers hanging above.

After a gorgeous pork terrine with peashoots, I enjoy a buttery skate wing, and pasta with Cromer crab, parsley and (too little) chilli. Dessert doesn't quite hit the spot: sea buckthorn berry posset is slimy and sickly, and we have to order it twice. Wines by the glass work out cheaper than buying the same as a half-bottle. Not that we're complaining.

We awake to see a herd of deer roaming through the mist, breakfast on bacon drop scones and duck eggs, then follow a path across farmland to Felbrigg Hall, a National Trust Jacobean mansion where a framed note in the library informs the household Queen Mary will visit on Wednesday at 3.30pm and her chauffeur and detective will bring their own tea. It's all as charmingly English as Gunton – African safari lodge, locals' pub, classic hunting estate, and hip hotel all in one.

