

VOGUE LIVING AUSTRALIA

Baccarat's
RUSSIAN ROMANCE *p91*

MODERNISM
IN A VICTORIAN
WINERY *p160*

ORGANIC CURVES
IN AN UNDERGROUND
MEXICAN HOUSE *p150*

MILAN
DESIGN
WEEK *p73*
PEOPLE,
TRENDS & IDEAS

MAGNOLIA DECORATION
AT THE CHALET, AN 1850s
COTTAGE IN SYDNEY P27

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india style
INSPIRING, COLOURFUL, EXOTIC

Olde soul

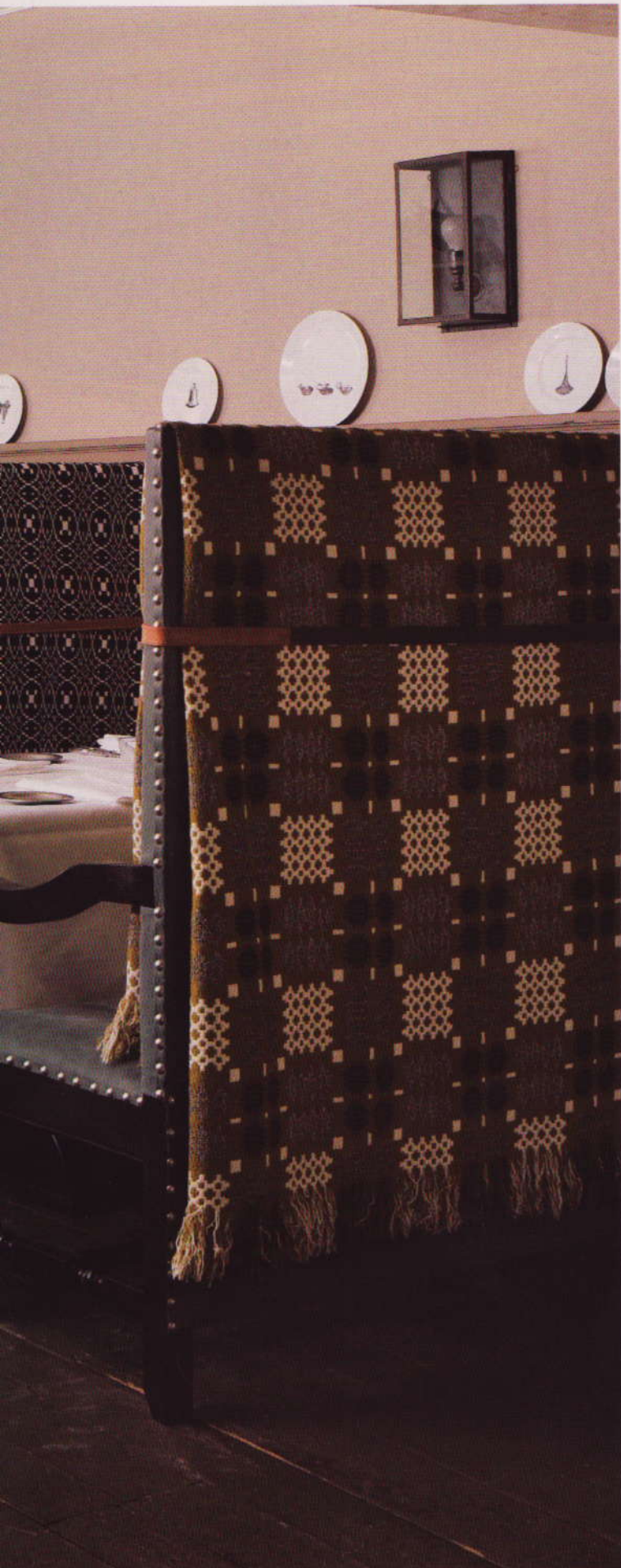


Interior designer Ilse Crawford has restored the star power of old Hollywood to the Olde Bell inn in Berkshire, England.

“People are what make it lovely, so we wanted to restore



that sense of life's cycle"



LEFT: SOLID OAK TRESTLE TABLES TEAM WITH THONET CHAIRS. ERCOL HIGH-BACK SEATS ARE COVERED IN BOLDLY GRAPHIC WELSH BLANKETS AND STRAPPED WITH LEATHER SADDLE BELTS. THE STAG HORN CHANDELIER WAS CUSTOM MADE IN SCOTLAND. ABOVE: BEDROOMS ARE SIMPLE, WITH GREEN GROVE WEAVERS BLANKETS AND A BEST & LLOYD LIGHT. A BRIGHT RED ROBERTS RADIO SENDS WAVES OF HAPPY NOSTALGIA. BELOW: HONEST, LOCAL INGREDIENTS GO INTO THE RESTAURANT'S FARE.





ALEXANDER TAYLOR'S 'FOLD' FLOOR LAMP FOR ESTABLISHED & SONS IS MADE FROM A SHEET OF BENT STEEL. THE WING CHAIR IS UPHOLSTERED IN FELT AND THE ROCKING CHAIR IS LINED WITH SHEEPSKIN FROM BRITISH SHEEPSKINS IN DEVON. THE TABLE IS BY ILSE CRAWFORD'S LONDON-BASED STUDIOILSE.

FARROW & BALL'S 'MOUSE'S BACK' PAINT WAS USED FOR ITS NEUTRAL WARMTH ON THE RESTAURANT'S PANELS. THE CANDLESTICK'S VIVID YELLOW WAS INSPIRED BY HOT ENGLISH MUSTARD. THE TEAM SOURCED VINTAGE BRASS CANDLESTICKS AND POWDER-COATED THEM IN THIS BESPOKE COLOUR. OPPOSITE: THE CLASSIC ENGLISH BROWN BETTY TEAPOT MAKES A RETURN TO INN LIFE. DETAILS, LAST PAGES.



GETTING BACK TO the roots of a building and way of life was at the core of designer Ilse Crawford and her company Studioilse's approach to rejuvenating the first in a series of inns in England's countryside.

"It was such a beautiful building, but completely dead. No-one cared about it," says Crawford of the Olde Bell, which Studioilse was required to bring back to life, along with a series of other traditional English inns for Dhillon Hotels.

"Inns have always been a fundamental part of English life – a warm, welcoming 'home away from home' for travellers passing through, providing them with a safe haven and somewhere to rest their weary feet for the night," she says. "We wanted to return that sense of ritual to the Olde Bell, to make it once again a place people could share the important moments of life in a relaxed, slightly rough but homey environment. To make it a place they feel they belong to."

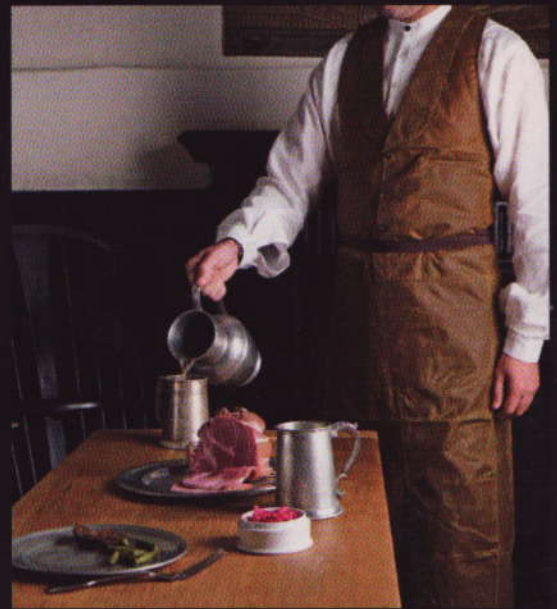
After years of neglect, the key was not only to strip the inn's interiors back to the bare bones ("working with what's there but moving it on a bit") but also to bring in a whole new network of like-minded staff and suppliers. Dhillon Hotels chairman Tej Dhillon's vision was clear; to create somewhere that offers great service, thoughtful design, satisfying food and relaxed surroundings. So Studioilse set out to link the concept of a traditional inn to the soul of the building. "An inn is almost like its own little village," says Crawford. "People are what make it lovely, so we wanted to restore that sense of life's cycle into the way it functions."

Hearty, locally sourced food is at the heart of this approach. Crawford has brought in the expertise of chef Rosie Sykes (who has a book, *The Kitchen Revolution*, out this year) to create a very English menu of terrines, roast lunches and indulgent puddings. "Bringing in local bakers, cheese mongers and smoking houses makes the locals feel a part of the place. And by using the inn's large garden [for ingredients], it becomes a self-sustaining body," says Crawford.

The very smallest attention to detail is what provides the magic. "Keys on the walls have been placed where pictures and objects were formerly hung," says Studioilse designer Corinne Quin. "Instead of filling in the holes we simply hung old keys." Much of the furniture, textiles and tableware was specially commissioned to local suppliers such as High Wycombe-based Ercol (which provided the restaurant's high-back seats and fireside chairs). Plates lining the dining-room walls are printed with vintage images taken from an old Victorian homewares catalogue as well as medieval woodcut prints of 'familiar' (witches, cats, hedgehogs, owls). "We thought they were very inn-like, given that the Olde Bell and [its village] Hurley are full of stories, legends, tales of ghosts and folklore."

From the 1940s through to the '60s, the Olde Bell was the glamorous out-of-town haunt for "beautiful people", where the likes of Liz Taylor and co would take a spin in their classic cars on the weekend. It's hoped the inn's restored spirit as a place for retreat, for conversation, for fun will be at the core of its success. Crawford envisages Punch & Judy shows in the wild garden on long summer afternoons. And a number of outbuildings (including a 16th-century Tudor barn and malt house) will be used for various functions.

"Ultimately we want it to be a place where three generations can fill it with life and laughter, but not so overwhelming that guests can't find a quiet place to retreat," she says, "to restore the inn's sense of humanity so that no-one feels excluded." FIONA MCCARTHY
The Olde Bell, Berkshire, (+44) 16 2882 5881, www.theoldebell.co.uk.



ABOVE: PEWTER PLATES AND GOBLET FROM THE COMPANY THAT SUPPLIED WARES FOR THE HARRY POTTER FILMS. BELOW: A VINTAGE BOBBIN-LEGGED TABLE WITH THONET CHAIRS SPRAYED A CUSTOM-MADE GREEN. DETAILS, LAST PAGES.

