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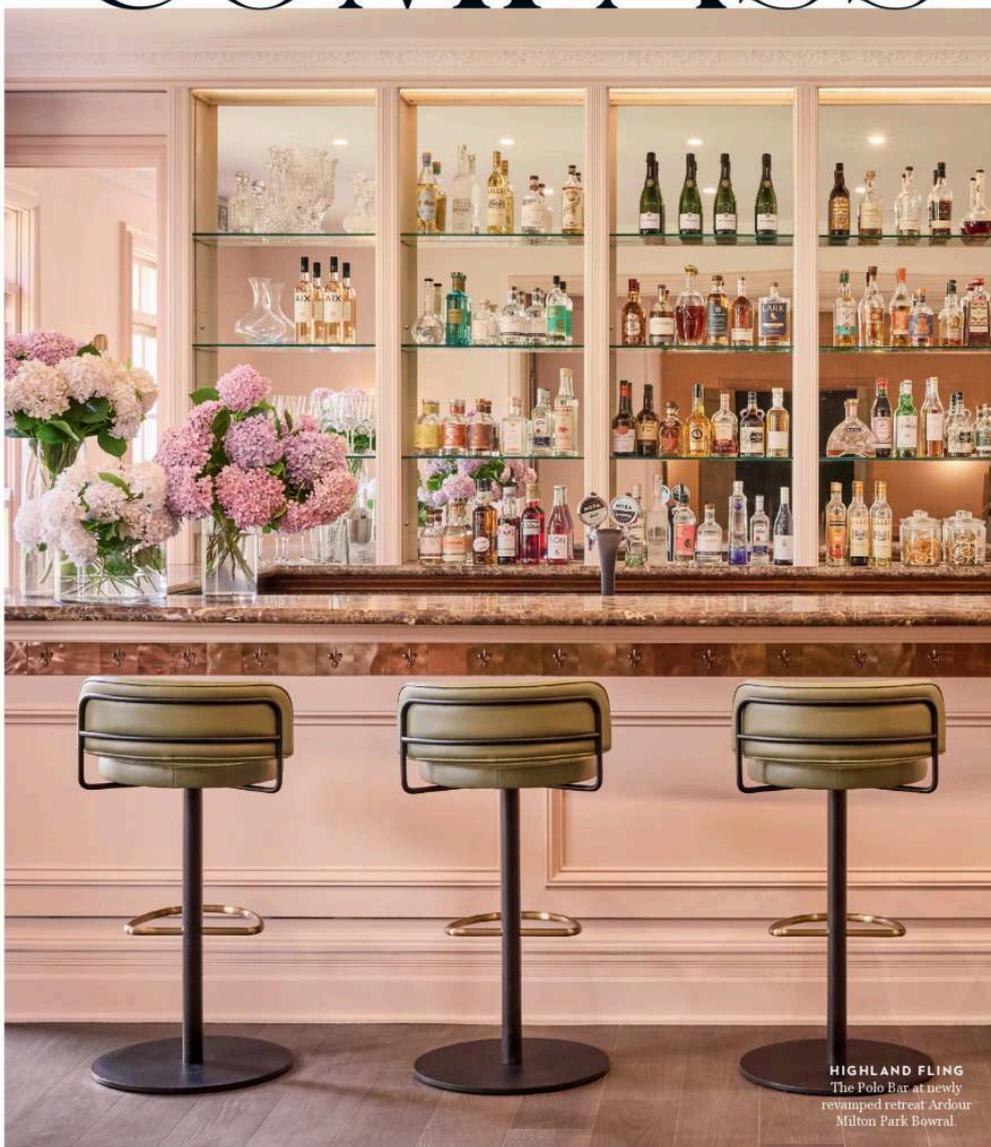
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COMPASS



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New directions in the travel world: the latest news, views and trends



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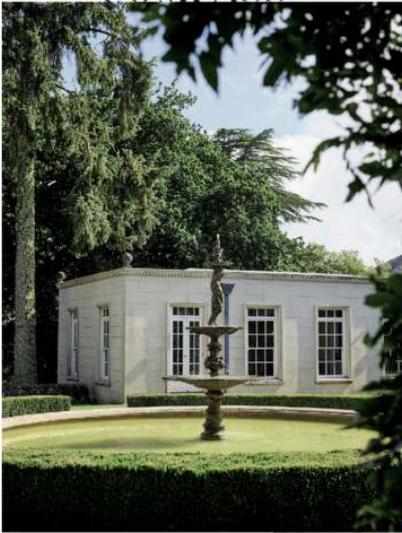
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COMPASS



GREAT VINTAGE
Horderns restaurant. Clockwise from far left: garden glimpse; Kate Greenwood, a sage-hued guest room; its bathroom.

MANOR REBORN

Equal parts Edwardian pleasure palace and modern retreat, a country-estate mansion in the Southern Highlands is drawing fans once more.



By George Epaminondas



Bowral's status as a rural idyll stretches back well over a century. Sydney sophisticates flocked to the Southern Highlands for its social whirl, sylvan beauty and congenial weather. One early adopter from the swell set was magnate Anthony Hordern, who converted a farm into Milton Park in 1910. The estate blossomed into life with a Federation Arts and Crafts mansion, sprawling Edwardian garden and a reputation for effervescent soirées. Since the 1980s, Milton Park has operated as a faithful if fusty hotel, but an ambitious makeover seeks to reawaken the golden age of the Hordern clan.

Checking in to Ardour Milton Park Bowral is akin to "arriving at the home of a friend with a grand country manor", says Kate Greenwood, creative director for Salter Brothers Hospitality (SBH). The group enlisted Sydney interior architect Alan McMahon of Mac Design Studio – known for fashioning Osborn House in Bundanook – to compose this new chapter. McMahon observed and refracted the property's history and then instituted sweeping changes: relocating the reception to the heart of the main structure, recreating the lounges and restaurants, and investing the accommodations with a heightened glamour.

Most of the 44 guest rooms are in one of two palettes – calming sage green or sprightly cobalt blue – and spruced with swirling woollen carpets, Carrara marble,

brushed brass and richly tactile layers. Among them are a handful of expansive suites with a blush-hued motif. "No two rooms feel the same," says Greenwood. "Thoughtful details create a personal retreat where guests can linger." A recurring feature is a mural above the bed that references the estate's weeping beech tree, which sits alongside an elm avenue, box hedges and rose bushes in the garden.

To ensure fans of the resort aren't left weeping at the modern interventions, the bones of the original manor by architects Morrow and de Putron as well as many of its period furnishings have been dutifully preserved. "Vintage armchairs, antique consoles, mirrors, and artworks were retained and restored where possible," adds Greenwood, "allowing their patina to remain part of the experience." Imagine if Henry James had set one of his novels in the Southern Highlands, with a lofty manor at its centre filled with handsome articles of furniture, and you get the drift.

When the Horderns arrived in the early 20th century, they transformed this leafy patch into a convivial playground, complete with idling seaplanes and clinking flutes. Their pleasure-seeking spirit endures at Horderns restaurant and The Polo Bar. "These names are a connective thread to the past," says chef Mark Holland. The English native, who trained under the exacting Marco Pierre

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DOUBLE BOWRAL
Exterior of the Federation Arts and Crafts house. Right: the elegant dining room at Horderns.



EARTHLY DELIGHTS
Chef Mark Holland. Right: the blooming garden. Far right: detail of a blue-toned guest room.



White and who has clocked time at restaurants in West Yorkshire, London and Sydney, excels at pan-European fare with an accent on local producers.

"The brief is refinement without stiffness," says Holland. Highlights from the updated menu include flame-grilled Fremantle octopus with potato and romesco, slow-braised lamb shoulder with herb salsa, and steamed rainbow trout with a classic French beurre blanc. "I want the cooking to feel timeless, not trend-led, and to sit comfortably within the setting," he adds. The Polo Bar will have a dedicated tippie-friendly menu. There's also a charcuterie room, where guests can assemble picnic hampers, and an elaborate high tea offering that will feel indulgent yet light.

Gourmands, design fans, green thumbs and, given the imminent launch of Eliva spa, wellness devotees will likely be drawn here like bees to honey. A property of this calibre may even tempt international visitors but, says general manager David McDonald, it's denizens of Sydney and Canberra who are the primary lodgers. "The new estate will have strong appeal for leisure travellers seeking a plush country escape," he says. "It will also be a place for private gatherings, weddings and milestone celebrations."

The Bowral venture is the first outing for the Ardour Hotels & Estates marque developed by SBH. Three more properties will join the burgeoning collection this

year: Lilianfels Blue Mountains, Spicers Guesthouse in the Hunter Valley, and Kingsford The Barossa in South Australia. The thematic link, says SBH chief executive Tash Tobias, is "iconic hotels with legacy, beauty and emotional connection. As one of Australia's most-storied regional estates, Milton Park offered the ideal opportunity to introduce the Ardour brand."

Backed by Australian-owned global alternative asset managers Salter Brothers, which was founded by brothers Paul and Robert Salter, SBH has evolved into a hospitality powerhouse in the past few years with 19 hotels and 29 restaurants and bars. SBH was established in 2023 after Salter Brothers snapped up Spicers Retreats as its first acquisition, followed by the Escarpment Group portfolio and, the following year, three Bannisters hotels in New South Wales.

Three years ago, the deep-pocketed player also nabbed Milton Park for \$20 million and injected \$10 million into its refurbishment. "We envisage the Ardour portfolio growing to 10 properties," says Tobias. For now, there's Milton Park in all its *Bridgerton*-style glory. "Even on cold or rainy days, guests can wander the misty gardens and retreat indoors to an open fire," says McDonald. And to winning, dining and hobnobbing with other roisterers. It appears the high life has returned to the Highlands. *Rooms from \$600. worldsapart.club*