

Hotel Grosvenor, Dorset

The hilltop town of Shaftesbury in Dorset is a place of quite staggering prettiness, so lovely in fact that Thomas Hardy used to stand at one of its many viewpoints and contemplate his favourite vista of rolling countryside. And, if anyone over 30 thought those memorable Hovis advertisements were filmed in Yorkshire, well you'll be amazed to learn that they were shot on Shaftesbury's very own steep and cobbled tourist attraction, Gold Hill.

Slap bang in the heart of this bustling Saxon market town is the Hotel Grosvenor, which has now been restored to its former glory after an extensive two-year refurbishment by new owner Charlie Barkshire and his wife, Helen. Cecil Beaton was once a regular and I'm sure he would approve of the modish new environment, which brings urban boutique chic into a grand old building with panache and assured elegance. The vast former ballroom now provides a great space for events, the courtyard is decked out with Philippe Starck furniture and the cocktail bar includes eye-catching light installations by Bruce Munro, including a flickering array of candles and a luminous moon. Beaton would also be delighted by the cocktail menu, which is worthy of the swankiest London hang-out.

When hunger strikes, The Greenhouse restaurant, a vision in olive hue with an open kitchen arrangement, allowing you to view masterchef Mark Treasure at work, serves up superiorly decent Dorset grub. Michelin-starred when at the Feathers in Woodstock, Treasure has also done time at Mirabelle and Langan's, but we're grateful that he's now returned to his Dorset roots and is seeking out the finest local producers to include on the menu, from Simon Harvell's Aberdeen Angus to Cranborne Chase cheeses. Gastronomic highlights include juicy braised lamp shank with spring carrots and olives and cod fillet served with prosciutto ham and cauliflower purée. Don't, though, whatever you do, forgo the white chocolate pudding – both a



DORSET STYLE
The recent refurbishment of Hotel Grosvenor puts it high up in the style stakes



thing of beauty and a textural, taste-bud sensation. Wines are affordable and original in their selection, with some jaunty South African numbers and other surprising New World choices on offer. On the walls, there is an interesting collection of modern art.

And so to bed, where you can choose to spread out in one of the suites with its open fireplace, chaise longue and vast, marble walk-in shower or chill out on a hand-made Beaudesert bed in any of the 16 rooms. In-room mod cons include Wifi, iPod docks and Tassimo coffee makers, outsize feature headboards and crisp Italian linen.

In the morning, settle down for the heartiest of breakfasts – the local sausages and kippers are a knockout. You can even carry a little bit of Hotel Grosvenor away with you when you set out to explore Hardy country – as they'll pack you off with a hamper stuffed full of Dorset goodies. ■

Matt Thomas



FACT BOX

GILPIN LODGE
From £270 for a double room per night, including breakfast and five-course supper.
015394 88818;
gilpinlodge.co.uk

HOTEL GROSVENOR
From £125 for a double room per night.
01747 850580;
hotelgrosvenor.com

