

**SEC
RET
STAYS**

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in collaboration with
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SEC
Pioneering
RET *Hosts*
of the
STAYS
New Chic

ASSOULINE

Introduction

Earlier this year, I went to stay as part of a big house party with the owners of the Hall at Bolton Abbey in Yorkshire. On Saturday morning, I wandered its quiet corridors, a mouse on the march. Floors creaked, pigeons cooed like bubbling soup outside the window, quiet murmurings of pots on the boil coiled up from the kitchen. In the breakfast room, I poured coffee into a cup. I folded the back of a newspaper, snap. I looked at the huge oil paintings of pale-faced ancestors sitting moonishly alongside their eager hounds and imagined the hushed squeak of their barks and their tails' soft swish along the flagstones.

But mostly, it was silent. A special kind of silence that goes back in time and forward in time in a corridor of forever. The kind of silence that changes the position of things, that makes you realize it's the house that's living and you're no more than a cell within its bloodstream for this pocket-small moment in time.

The Hall belongs to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. It was built in 1678. And now it's open for revelers of all descriptions. For anyone who wants to suck up picnics on the moors, knee-deep in treacle tart and red wine, who hankers for walks, for landing a fat trout on the lawn, for pottering around the abbey, for pressing backs against the mossy walls of the kitchen garden and gorging on soft, sweet greengages.

The Hall is not alone in this endeavor. These usually private spots, these hidden homes, these mysterious castles, these outlandish *castelli* and *riads* and monasteries and châteaux, previously entirely inaccessible, have now flung open their doors. Partly motivated out of financial viability, it's also been made possible because society walls are being dismantled by a younger generation who have a new attitude, who are not scared of sharing, and who understand the power for all in being open-armed.

How one-dimensional these places have made run-of-the-mill hotels look! How wide-eyed and functional! Here is history, storytelling, fortunes won and lost, layers to experience. Here is something unique and of this place, and of this place alone! At one point in the hotel boom that began gathering real pace in the '90s, it looked like all we wanted to do was fly and flop. To have breakfast on the terrace with those little pots of honey and strawberry jam. To gorge on pillow menus and chocolate rooms and brunch on a tray that floated in the infinity pool attached to our overwater villa.

But it turned out we also wanted something else, and in the noughties, someone else made that possible. People were, strangely if you think about it, renting out rooms to complete strangers, from a tiny flat in Copenhagen to a farmhouse in Bulgaria. And suddenly, it was happening everywhere. And suddenly, everyone was doing it. Airbnb changed what we gave value to, and it changed how we behaved. We loved being in people's houses now, tucked up into their lives; we loved the immediacy of the experience, the privacy, the control, the person in the personality of the place.

Perhaps more importantly at the center of this cultural shift, this morphing shape of how we travel, has been the mighty retro-realization that we believe again in true hospitality. We have a desire to provide which goes far beyond the transactional. To take strangers in, to shelter them from the storm, to exchange stories of different lands, to break bread, to offer rest.

It is feasibly one of the simplest and most profound of human undertakings. And it is what the game-changing owners in this book do: open their doors to what are now the world's most remarkable places to stay.

Melinda Stanup



Castello di Reschio

Owned by the Bolza family



It's a wondrous altered reality at Reschio. The family setup would have been a Bertolucci film in the making: Patriarch Count Antonio Bolza (mad for horses, with a stable of forty Spanish dressage purebreds), architect son Benedikt (spent his teenage holidays measuring the estate's houses and recording their various states of disrepair and ruin), his wildly creative wife, Nencia (grew up in Florence's Palazzo Corsini), and a quintet of children, who, when not studying design or hotel management, return home each summer to write and star in theatrical performances for the guests. The Bolza family entered the scene in 1994 with the purchase of the thousand-year-old castle, fifty or so crumbling sixteenth-century farmhouses, and 3,700 acres of rolling Umbrian farmland, heady with the smell of overgrown wild thyme and broom like an unkempt arcadia. Doing something meaningful—and profitable—with it seemed an impossible task. "You always need a foreigner, don't you?" Benedikt says with a laugh. "My father's Hungarian. My mother's Austrian. We lost all our estates in Hungary after the Second World War, so my father wasn't put off by doing something crazy. It was a way to regrow our roots." Benedikt and Nencia, who for years wandered about with a pet canary in her hair, brought their children up in the wreck of the castle. "It was far too big for us. We had a lot of guest bedrooms. They didn't have any heating, but they looked okay in summer. In the winter they were not so nice. When it rained, the water came through the roof." It's a far cry from the way Reschio is now. The castle, after three and a half years of toil and graft, is extravagantly reimaged as a hotel and, with such lively, soulful custodians, has become a thoroughbred that ambitiously and vivaciously dances to its own exemplary tune. Twenty-nine of the abandoned farm buildings, most with no roofs, have been revived to megawatt villas, owned by international designers and tech pioneers, sold at a rate of around one a year, and some rented out when the owners are not in residence. It's a turbocharged project of serious intentions and integrity, as well as deeply considered design. And what, then, does the future hold for Reschio? "Protection, protection, protection" is Benedikt's mantra. "And then of course there's so much more to restore. I've only done half the houses. It will go on for a long time."



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