



# FORTUNE'S FOLD

**NESTLED IN GREEN VALLEYS AND WOODED HILLS, MEDIEVAL AND MELLOW-STONE SHERBORNE IS A DORSET GEM. GISELLE WHITEAKER EXPLORES THE SIGHTS OF THIS PICTURESQUE TOWN.**

**T**here's nothing quite like arriving in a new destination and being collected in style. The nostalgia-inducing 1964 Beardmore Paramount MK7 London taxi – considered the Rolls Royce of taxis – that awaits my mother Judy and I when we alight from the train in Sherborne in Dorset most certainly embodies classic style. Ian Crighton, our temporary Chauffeur and the Marketing Manager of The Eastbury Hotel, cranks up the car and we rumble down the street towards the hotel, heads turning in our wake.

The Eastbury itself is also somewhat of a stylish classic. The boutique Georgian-period listed townhouse dates from 1740 and was acquired by renowned hoteliers Peter and Lana de Savary earlier this year. Change is afoot. Much refurbishment work has already been completed, but General Manager Dominee Worman points out the areas marked for further

work, as the de Savarys stamp their own brand of panache onto the establishment. A "Hobbit House Spa", built from local stone and complete with a sedum and moss roof and circular doorway, will be tucked into a leafy corner of the garden and five new Potting Shed Garden Suites taking inspiration from traditional English Victorian Potting Sheds will be discreetly located within the landscaping and feature their own private terraces, fire pits, sedum roofs and undoubtedly tasteful and creative interiors, if our room is anything to go by.

We are housed in Yew, the Superior Four Poster Garden Suite, which features a private walled garden, along with a spectacular four-poster bed from the 1700s. The bed may be old, but naturally, the mattress and bedding are new, blending modern and classical glamour.



Before dinner, we take a stroll through the garden, with its lush lawn partly set up as a croquet court. A private dining pod sits at the far end of the lawn and dotted throughout are metal wildlife sculptures: two owls guard our garden; a heron gazes at the main hotel building; a falcon with wings stretched wide looks to have just landed on the restaurant roof; and two deer hide amongst the trees.

When the light fades, we are drawn to the award-winning Conservatory Restaurant, Seasons, which boasts two Rosettes for culinary excellence. A pianist sits between the cosy bar and dining area, providing musical accompaniment to the melody of dishes concocted by Executive Chef Matt Street and his team. We soon discover it's a perfectly tuned melody.

Unable to decide between dishes, we opt for the tasting menu. The opening sonata is an amuse bouche of spiced pumpkin with seeds before the lighter notes of pork coppa, snaps, ricotta and olive oil reach the table, leaving a lingering aroma of mint and truffle. The intriguing Vale of Camelot cheese brûlée with pear, celeriac and walnuts is the adagio, as we slow down to savour the flavours of this delightful composition, the sweet crust of the brûlée cracking under the weight of our forks to reveal a creamy cheese disc, paired with chicory-leaf cups packed with celeriac. The Devon crab with cucumber and horseradish, apple and dill dances a minuet on our tongues, before the crescendo of rump of lamb with caramelised red onions, Greek yoghurt, courgette and oregano. A sweet allegro chimes in near the end, with caramelised banana, salted caramel and pecan brittle so good it deserves the encore of Valrhona chocolate crémeux, hazelnut ice cream and passion fruit. This altogether satisfying symphony sends us to our room to sleep.

With only one full day to explore Sherborne, we set off the next morning armed with ambition. We stroll through the local market that leads us to Sherborne Abbey. Founded by St Aldhelm in AD 705, the Abbey has developed from a Saxon cathedral to the worshipping heart of a monastic community, and finally, to a beautiful parish church with an impressively ornate fan-vaulted ceiling that is simply breathtaking.

Leaving the peaceful Abbey behind, we browse the glut of independent stores lining Cheap Street. Ironically, this leaves me several hundred pounds poorer, and we are forced to return to The Eastbury to deposit the spoils of my shopping binge before we can continue.



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Cheese brûlée.



Caramelised banana.



Valrhona chocolate crèmeux.



Pork coppa.

A short walk leads us to the atmospheric ruins of Sherborne Old Castle, once leased by Sir Walter Raleigh. Only the Southwest Gatehouse and parts of the Great Tower and the North Range survive, after being “slighted” by a Parliamentary army under Sir Thomas Fairfax during the Civil War. It’s a lovely spot for a picnic, but grey clouds are threatening, so we move on to the “new” castle, built by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1594 and owned by the Digby family since 1617.

Sherborne Castle opened its doors to the general public in 1967 and remains a popular attraction. The historic house reflects a variety of decorative styles from over 400 years of English history, its rich interiors packed with collections of art, furniture and porcelain, together with Raleigh’s original kitchen, family artefacts and archaeological finds from the old medieval castle displayed in the castle cellars. Each room contains information sheets, detailing the art and furniture, but also bringing the stories of its connected characters to life.

By the time we stroll back to The Eastbury, the night is closing in and there’s a chill in the air. The dulcet piano tones are calling from Seasons restaurant and we are once more drawn into its fold. Much like The Eastbury, Sherborne has proved beguiling, steeped in history and decked in architectural finery, with a friendly heart. It is perhaps understandable that Sir Walter Raleigh dubbed Sherborne “his fortune’s fold”. ■

#### INFO

For more information about The Eastbury or Seasons restaurant, see [www.theeastburyhotel.co.uk](http://www.theeastburyhotel.co.uk)

#### ESCAPES

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