

hot spots

The Grove, Hertfordshire, England

Where is it? The 120-hectare property, once home to the earls of Clarendon and visited by Queen Victoria and Edward VII, is set in the rolling hills of Hertfordshire, 29km from central London.

Contemporary or classic? Unlike most English manor houses converted to posh country hotels, the Grove isn't all about period pomp and pantomime. Designed by Martin Hulbert (whose credits include the cabins aboard the QE2), the interiors might be dubbed "groovy grand". A pleasing but decadent palette of vibrant colours and rich textures, antique furnishings, bespoke fixtures and hundreds of whimsical one-off pieces by German artist Volker Kuhn give it a chic, contemporary feel.

What's so different about it? The sheer scale of the property and the breadth of its facilities mean that, near London, it is without equal. In addition to the original

18th-century mansion, which underwent eight years of renovation, the property contains a new west wing that houses most of the 227 hi-tech rooms and suites.

Who should visit? This is a hang-out for well-heeled jet-setters, rich Europeans, footballers' wives and those who frequently reach for the pages of *Gala*, *Tatler* and *Hello!*. Other guests have included entertainers Robbie Williams and Kylie Minogue, former British prime minister Tony Blair and actors Jude Law and Sienna Miller.

What is there to do? With one of Britain's best spas at their disposal, most waffle-robed guests head straight to the dimly lit and velvet-draped relaxation area, where they sip herbal tea and nibble on nuts and dried fruit before having treatments. Others make for the saunas and steam rooms or dive into the 22-metre black-mosaic-tile indoor swimming pool. There



is also a fitness centre and an outdoor pool. The confident may hit the Kyle Phillips championship golf course, which measures a fearsome 6.5km and recently hosted Tiger Woods and friends. The languid may walk the manicured grounds, which are speckled with sculptures, art installations and reflecting pools, or head to the 1.2-hectare walled garden, where they can play tennis or croquet. A new beach club, complete with volleyball courts and six individually designed huts, assembled on a ribbon of golden sand, will appeal to sun worshippers.

What's on the menu? Something for everyone, courtesy of three restaurants. Gastronomes head to Colette's, where, beneath the original 18th-century

plasterwork mouldings, they'll feast on chef Chris Harrod's handiwork, including poached pigeon d'anjou with foie gras and wild mushrooms in a truffle bouillon. At the modernist Glasshouse, guests wade through a United Nations of cuisine while The Stables specialises in gastropub comfort food such as hamburgers and wood-fired pizzas. Most guests end up in the mansion's elegant candle-lit drawing rooms for postprandial cocktails.

What's the bottom line? Rooms start at £280 (HK\$4,400) a night.

The Grove is at Chandler's Cross, Hertfordshire, England, tel: 44 1923 807 807; www.thegrove.co.uk.
Farhad Heydari

spree New York modern art

From Andy Warhol and Roy Liechtenstein to Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, New York has been home and inspiration to many of modern art's marquee names. Look for the Next Big Thing at the city's many independent galleries.

Start in New York's best-known art district, Chelsea, and **Agora Gallery** (530 West 25th Street, tel: 1 212 226 4151). This gallery commissions striking works by talented newcomers and provides helpful information for those new to buying art. Among the eye-catching offerings are the colourful graphics of Fiona Viney, who focuses on animals, cars and food.

Head to arty Greenwich Village and **Franklin 54 Gallery** (181 Christopher Street, tel: 1 212 627 8690), which represents a roster of artists who depict New York. Sharon Florin's images of the Manhattan skyline and other iconic American scenes make superior souvenirs. Charles Bentz creates almost cinematic images of this part of the US. His oil on canvas *Main Street Nantucket* (US\$1,350) is particularly dazzling.

If you question your artistic judgment, visit the store at the **Museum of Modern Art** (11 West 53rd Street, tel: 1 212 708 9400) for prints of some of the world's most famous works. Jasper Johns' *Flag* costs US\$175 while Paul Klee's *Cat and Bird* is US\$17.95. You can



pick up prints of works by Dali, Chagall and Cezanne for a very reasonable US\$8.50.

For something more exclusive, go east to **Pace Prints** (32 East 57th Street, tel: 1 212 421 3237), which specialises in high-quality limited-edition prints. Take home a moody, black and white image by Mark Sheinkman (US\$1,000) or one of Donald Baechler's cheery, Japanese-style woodcuts (US\$750).

If you want a one-off but are uncertain about entering a commercial gallery, visit **Our Name is Mud** (above; Grand Central Station Terminal, Lexington Passage, tel: 1 212 388 9559). For just US\$20 this tiny ceramics store will inscribe a mug with any message. The company also works with

artists on more serious customised ceramic works. This shop might not represent modern art in its purest form but it sells innovative ideas at affordable prices.

The store at the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (1000 Fifth Avenue, next to Central Park, tel: 1 212 535 7710) offers arty adornments for the dining table, including glasses inspired by architect Frank Lloyd Wright (US\$32). The reproduction sculptures such as the Degas *Dancer* (US\$295) are so well made they could pass for the real thing.

If you spend more than you planned to, console yourself with the thought that one day your purchases could be causing a stir at auction. *Nicolette Loizou*

trial run Bike Friday

What is it? A range of foldable bicycles designed for globe-trotting cyclists.

Why do I need one? Most folding bicycles are bulky so many airlines apply restrictions or handling charges. All Bike Friday's bicycles are designed for storage inside the standard-sized, hard-shell Travel Case (US\$229), which meets international airline check-in requirements and has a three-dial combination lock, extendable handle and wheels. There is also space for a cycling helmet.

How does it work? Each package includes a toolkit and how-to-pack video. Step-by-step instructions and video demonstrations are available at www.bikefriday.com.

Tell me more. Bike Fridays are tailor-made for the owner's height, weight and other personal specifications. Frame types include ultra-quick "folders" and bikes with suspended titanium-frame seats. Touring, road, racing, mountain, commuter and family-friendly tandem bicycles are available. Each weighs less than 20kg when packed.

What's the downside? Test rides are not available because the bicycles are made to order. A 30-day money-back guarantee and offer to connect prospective buyers with Bike Friday owners in their area provide some peace of mind.

Where can I find one? Contact Bike Friday's Asia representative at ruthyk@bikefriday.com or go to the

Flying Ball Bicycle Company (478 Castle Peak Road, Cheung Sha Wan, tel: 2381 3661; www.flyingball.com). Prices for the New World Tourist bicycle (right) start at US\$875.
Catherine Shaw

