

THE HOTEL: Set at the foot of the Mendip Hills on the banks of the River Axe, this Jacobean-style Victorian mansion was previously a family home, a private school and a rather more ordinary hotel before antiques expert and gin maker Martin Miller bought the property with its 18 acres two years ago. He has been decorating and cramming the place with his eclectic collection ever since – every surface (oak-panelled wall, cabinet, dresser, piano, you name it) is covered with paintings, stuffed animals, candles, family photos, glass bowls filled with sweets, stacked books, suits of armour and objets d'art.

THE ROOM: There are 15 individually styled rooms although the hotel was fully booked during our visit so we couldn't take a peek at a few of the others. Our room, at the back of the house, overlooks the River Axe at the bottom of the garden, and boasts a canopied four-poster. Books are scattered about, including Miller's tongue-in-cheek whodunit *The Wookey Hole Affair* which gives a good introduction to its author, and guests are invited to take a copy home. The bathroom is stocked with L'Occitane products (although we found four bottles of shampoo, some soap and not much else). Water, fruit and a flat-screen TV are the only suggestions that this is a hotel and not an eccentric relative's home.

DOWNSTAIRS: A private dining room for up to 40, a snooker room, with silver from Buckingham Palace lining one length of a wall; a small plunge pool, sauna and an all-black mini-cinema with sofas, big screen and library of DVDs can all be found on the lower ground floor.

THE RESTAURANT: The elegant Riverview dining room was full of locals as well as hotel guests. We plumped for a very fresh Miller's seafood cocktail and a homely lentil soup to start. For mains we chose a deliciously rich spelt risotto with morel mushrooms, wild garlic, goats' cheese and asparagus as well as a light, well-executed pan-fried bream fillet with olive mash, fennel and saffron sauce. Of course, local cheeses such as Wookey Hole aged-Cheddar are a cheeseboard staple.

THE UPSIDE: It is clear that a lot of love has gone into this really fun Aladdin's Cave-style bolthole. Miller was in residence with his wife during our visit and he suggested we visit the Sunday market in nearby Cheddar, where he was heading – no doubt to find more curiosities for the hotel. We loved the honesty bar and the garden with secret hidey-holes.

THE DOWNSIDE: Our antique bed wouldn't be very comfortable for anyone over 6ft and the mattress was a bit soft. The bathroom is small and the shower produced a mere trickle.

THE EXTRAS: You're offered a complimentary Miller's Gin with breakfast (full English, continental or both); there are wrapped gifts for children in the hall and guests can also enjoy fishing for brown trout and perch, croquet and boules on the lawn.

THE DETAILS: Doubles from £165, including breakfast. Dinner for two, about £60 without wine.

Glencot House, Glencot Lane, Wookey Hole, Wells, Somerset, BA5 1BH, 01749 677160, www.glencothouse.co.uk



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