

ESCAPE



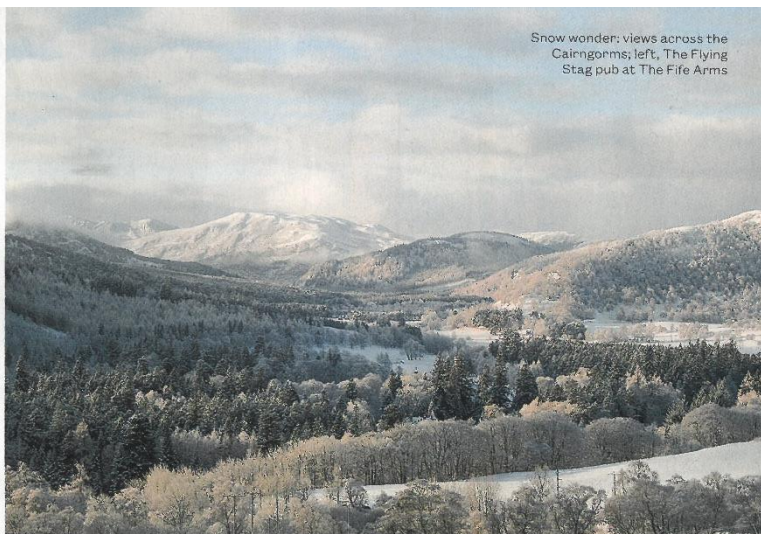
The village of Braemar has always lured outdoorsy types. It is one of the last stops one can drive to, up the road from Ballater, before hikers, ramblers and highland wanderers disembark to explore the mossy brown shoulders of the Cairngorms by foot.

The Fife Arms was established in the mid 19th century as a coaching inn to provide affordable accommodation for visitors passing through, and is named after the Duke of Fife, who married a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. The area is rich in royal history: Braemar has played host for the past 186 years to the Braemar Gathering, a Highland Games spectacular that the Queen attends from her nearby perch at Balmoral.

But what drew Iwan and Manuela Wirth, the Swiss power couple behind the Hauser & Wirth galleries, to this humble inn?

The project was twofold. The couple had acquired another historic property on a neighbouring estate and had set about turning it into a home in the Highlands. This segued quite naturally into the rejuvenation of the Fife, which had been the heart of Braemar as the local pub but had fallen into such a state of disrepair that one long-time resident described it as 'quite literally crumbling into the ground'.

From the outside, the property still looks like something from a Wes Anderson movie with its white and red gabled roof and gilded signage. But inside it's the creative vision of interior designer Russell Sage that dominates. Each of the 46 rooms is dedicated to Braemar's historic visitors, including monarchs and writers (Lord Byron, Robert Louis



Snow wonder: views across the Cairngorms; left, The Flying Stag pub at The Fire Arms

HIGHLAND TIMES

Dipal Acharya visits the hotel that Hauser & Wirth built

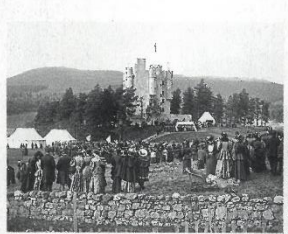
Stevenson). The jewel-box cocktail bar is named after couturier Elsa Schiaparelli, a close friend of Lady Frances Farquharson, the former *Harper's Bazaar* editor who married into the local Farquharson clan.

Art is also part of the hotel's DNA, from a Louise Bourgeois spider in the hotel courtyard and Victorian taxidermy exhibits to original drawings and installations on the walls by artists-in-residence Gideon Summerfield and Alec Finlay. There is also an original Picasso and a Lucian Freud on the

walls — although our favourite art piece had to be the psychedelic hand painted ceiling in the hotel's drawing room, by Zhang Enli, inspired by topographic maps and the marbling patterns found within local quartz specimens.

That the Wirths have turned into accidental hoteliers up here feels like a tribute to the village and its residents, resurrecting a Braemar icon and creating many jobs in the process, without a fixation on profit making (rooms here start at a modest £130 but feel much pricier than that). There's a Blake quote that comes to mind: 'Great things are done when men and mountains meet.' You feel that The Fife Arms, in the shadow of the Cairngorms, is proof of this. (thefifearms.com)

"THE WIRTHS HAVE RESURRECTED A BRAEMAR ICON"



Master clans: the centuries-old Braemar Gathering; right, one of the rooms at The Fife Arms



THE COUNTRY CHECKLIST



THE BAG
MULBERRY Seaton bag, £995 (mulberry.com)

THE SCENT
CHANEL No 5 limited edition, £130 (chanel.com)

THE JUMPER
HADES Alphabet E Knit, £160 (hades-shop.co.uk)

THE SKINCARE
CHARLOTTE TILBURY The Gift of Magic Skin kit, £55 (charlotte-tilbury.com)

