



'Gay? Supposing I am and I don't want to talk about it?' Stefanie Marsh meets Cliff Richard

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The cool hotel guide

The Wheatsheaf, Gloucestershire

Just after the Wheatsheaf Inn opened in the cute Cotswolds village of Northleach this year, an unusual guest checked in, wearing a flowing kaftan. It was the lead singer of the Sex Pistols, John Lydon, otherwise known as Johnny Rotten. He was recording a new album in a nearby studio run by Steve Winwood (of Traffic and Go fame) and he stayed eight weeks.

He created quite a stir. "One night during a wine-tasting event he stood in a corner and demanded everyone's attention," said Sam Pearman, the laidback co-owner of the Wheatsheaf, a relaxed private members club-style pub with a restaurant and rooms, which he runs with his wife, Georgie. "Then he began singing the Abba song *Fernando* and waving his arms about, conducting so that everyone joined in. Soon the whole wine-tasting crowd was singing."

Apparently, Lydon wore his kaftan for



the entire visit, making friends with the locals, staying up late in the bar and generally giving the Wheatsheaf an extremely unusual start to its new life. But apart from its rock'n'roll guests — Charlie Watts, of the Rolling Stones, and Winwood have also visited — it is perhaps the most chic new place to stay in the Cotswolds.

Take my room, with its abstract painting of Jack Nicholson near the door, a giant Bang & Olufsen television, cool Anglepoise lights, tweed armchairs and pistachio wooden wall panels. A double door led to a bathroom with stylish grey floor tiles and large tin tub. The toiletries were by Bramley — large tubes of sage and lemongrass body washes and juniper berry and bergamot essential oils.

It was a nice pad. Downstairs, fires were crackling in three large fireplaces in the bar and the restaurant. The Wheatsheaf is a coaching inn dating from the 1650s, with low ceilings, snugs and a stable at



The Wheatsheaf offers a chic new place to stay in the Cotswolds

the back that has been converted into a separate little bar. I stayed at the front, drinking a local ale with Sam, a former rugby player, aged 35, who began his time in hospitality shucking oysters at Langan's Brasserie in Mayfair.

The restaurant, which has a modern English menu with a seafood and steak slant, was buzzing. I tucked into devilled Cornish crab with rocket and lemon followed by half a lobster with mayonnaise, watercress, lemon and chips, washed down with Californian white wine. Each dish was well prepared and brought swiftly, even though it was a busy night (though no sign of Johnny Rotten or impromptu renditions of *Fernando*).

But the Wheatsheaf is a lot of fun even without rock stars in kaftans. I'm sure it is going to do very well.

Tom Chesshyre

Need to know

The Wheatsheaf Inn
(01451 860244, cotswoldswheatsheaf.com), West End, Northleach, Gloucestershire GL54 3EZ. B&B doubles from £120. Two courses about £23. **Room** 8.5 out of 10 **Food** 8.5 **Service** 9 **Value** 8 **Cool factor** 9 **Score** 8.6

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