

Fairytale makeover for the Enchanted Manor hotel

Report by Anna Pocock
Pictures by Laura Holme

WHEN Maggie Hilton first stepped over the threshold of Windcliffe Manor Hotel in Niton, she remarked on its enchanting atmosphere. Once family seat to the wealthy Kirkpatrick clan, the handsome stone manor house is set in an acre of woodland that slopes down to captivating sea views.

Latterly converted into a family-run guest-house, the hotel had seen better days by the time Maggie and her Australian husband, Ric, chanced upon it.

Having already run several successful Island establishments, including the Celebration Hotel in Shanklin, Victorian tearoom The Royal Essex Cottage and boutique retreat, Koala Cottage, in Godshill (which they built and designed from scratch), Ric and Maggie were ready to get their teeth into a new challenge and realised the manor house had great potential.

After winning the hotel at an auction last October, Maggie decided to capitalise on the magical quality that had so appealed to her and give the place a fairytale transformation.

"But we definitely didn't want to do a Disneyland", Ric is quick to point out. "We just wanted it to be that bit different to your usual, run of the mill, minimalist hotel," agreed Maggie.

And so was born The Enchanted Manor.

Inspired by the glittering fantasy paintings of artist Josephine Wall, they set about turning the run-down manor house into a luxury boutique hotel — with a very special twist.

Drafting in a plumber, electrician and general builder to tackle the nuts and bolts of the renovation, Maggie and Ric have been far from hands-off themselves. As Ric got stuck into the massive task of



Height of luxury — silky-draped four-poster bed. 0307-L20464

The Enchanted Manor will be featured in a TV programme, *Under The Hammer*, to be screened on BBC TV later this spring — date yet to be announced.

While the spacious manor house could easily accommodate up to 20 double bedrooms, Maggie was determined not to compromise on the sense of luxury she wanted to achieve. Instead, she and Ric knocked down several partition walls to open up many of the rooms into vast suites, complete with their own lounges and en-suite bathrooms.

Enticingly named with promises such as Dreamtime, Serenity and Candlelight, each suite features a hand-carved four-poster bed and free-standing slipper bath. Opulent decor, including crushed velvet wall-coverings and silk swagged curtains, thanks to the skill of Marlene Irving and her magic with swags and drapes, add to the romantic vibe.

For technophiles, there are state-of-the-art power showers and 26-inch flat-screen televisions, with accompanying DVD players for cosy nights in.

While Maggie has waved her magic wand over each and every detail — right down to the fairy decorated light switches and rose petals scattered across the bed linen — the overall effect is of sumptuous elegance...with a sparkle.

What could easily have ended up a saccharine indulgence, is instead a uniquely luxurious experience.

But Maggie's ambitious plans don't stop there. She can't wait to embark on landscaping the woodland garden and hopes to create an equally enchanting paradise in the hotel grounds — already home to badgers, red squirrels, pheasant and peacocks. And a first-class spa will soon join the existing swimming pool, to ensure guests receive a magically relaxing break from reality, in every way possible.

Opening in May with a grand Fairy Ball, prices start at £199 per person for a three-night package. Bookings can be made by telephoning the hotel or via the website www.enchantedhotel.co.uk



A bronze unicorn welcomes visitors to the Enchanted Manor hotel at Niton, formerly the Windcliffe Manor Hotel. 0307-L20439



Above: comfy armchairs, sumptuous decor in this suite. 0307-L20470



Maggie and Ric Hilton, who have transformed the hotel into an Enchanted Manor. 0307-L20439

Magical feel with clouds swirling across the ceiling, plus luxury drapes and swags by Marlene Irving, above and below. 0307-L20442/463



Right: light, bright dining in the attractive conservatory. 0307-L20455



Careful attention to detail makes this stylised bathroom special. 0307-L20469



Fairy art decorates the Enchanted Manor. 0307-L20467

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