

A WELLNESS STAYCATION AT HECKFIELD PLACE

by Angelina Villa-Clarke, Independent Travel Journalist.

Step inside The Bothy by Wildsmith at Heckfield Place and your senses will already be filled with the scents of lavender, rosemary and rose. Found beyond the hotel's walled garden (so idyllic that it looks like it belongs in a fairy-tale picture book), you brush past colourful blooms to find a wellness space that immerses you in nature.

It's no surprise, really, for Heckfield Place's USP is its true connection to the land. The country house hotel in Hampshire has been carved out of what was once a Georgian manor house found on the historic Heckfield Estate, the upper part of which was designed in the late 19th century by horticulturist William Walker Wildsmith.

Surrounding it are exquisite gardens, extensive woodland and Heckfield Home Farm, one of the UK's leading biodynamic market gardens and organic farms, whose bountiful organic produce supplies the hotel's restaurants, overseen by chef Skye Gyngell, as well as local communities.

Guests can spend their days exploring the 250-year-old estate by booking in for one of the team's daily insightful tours. The estate manager will take you through fields of rosehips and blackberries, past herb gardens and into greenhouses bursting with heritage vegetables, explaining its history and provenance as you go.

Just as the estate's flowers slowly release their fragrance, once you enter The Bothy, you also gradually release your tension. The lobby has been created from one of the estate's original bothies - a place of shelter for caretakers of the land. But its charming brick exterior belies what lies beyond

- a cavernous 17,000 sq ft space. Here, you can pop into a small boutique selling The Bothy's own skincare brand, Wildsmith Skin. Named after the estate's former Head Gardener, the products are used for all therapies. It is also where you hand over your phone (to be kept in a charging-station locker) and kick off your shoes to give yourself over to a holistic journey designed, says Reka Seres-Erdei, Bothy Director, "to return guests to a simpler time; a slower time."

No matter what season you visit, the floor-to-ceiling windows flood the two-storey space with light. Rough-hewn, curvy limestone walls are cocooning and are somehow reminiscent of cave dwellings; while farm-style carver chairs, botanical art and hanging metal sculptures are a juxtaposition between old and new worlds.


From the Nordic sauna to the chlorine-free swimming pool (referred to as The Waters, as it is purified by natural minerals), there are constant glimpses of the outside - undulating tall grasses and aged hawthorn trees meeting your eyeline. There's also a steaming, outdoor hydrotherapy pool and three contemporary movement studios for yoga and Pilates classes.

At the heart of The Bothy's wellness offering, however, are its immersive wellness journeys, all of which have

been inspired by the estate and are led by one of the spa's master practitioners or resident expert therapists. Tapping into the trend for slow travel - except, this is slow wellness - guests are recommended to visit The Bothy for a minimum of three hours, with longer-than-usual treatments taking place around dawn, noon and dusk each day. "Designed," says Reka, "to follow the pattern of nature and to tune into our circadian rhythms."

What makes the wellness journeys standout, compared to other bog-standard hotel therapies, you might wonder? The answer is simple and ingenious: they have all been designed to be customisable, so that each therapist can adapt their touch or tweak what is offered, according to each guest's needs. For specific concerns, you can still book in with master practitioners who specialise in naturopathy, osteopathy, reiki, bodywork and more, but if you are looking for a bespoke reset, then the hero experience, Wildsmith Time, is a revelation.

Taking an indulgent two hours and 25 minutes, it starts with kinesiology, during which you are told to resist your therapist's pushing and pulling, so that they can diagnose any areas of concern. In my case, a weak lower back and tight shoulders were the



main issue and the result of too much time crouched over a laptop. As you lie back to a soundtrack of gentle birdsong (recorded on the estate), a therapeutic massage follows targeted at these areas and using essential oil blends formulated to the given time of day.

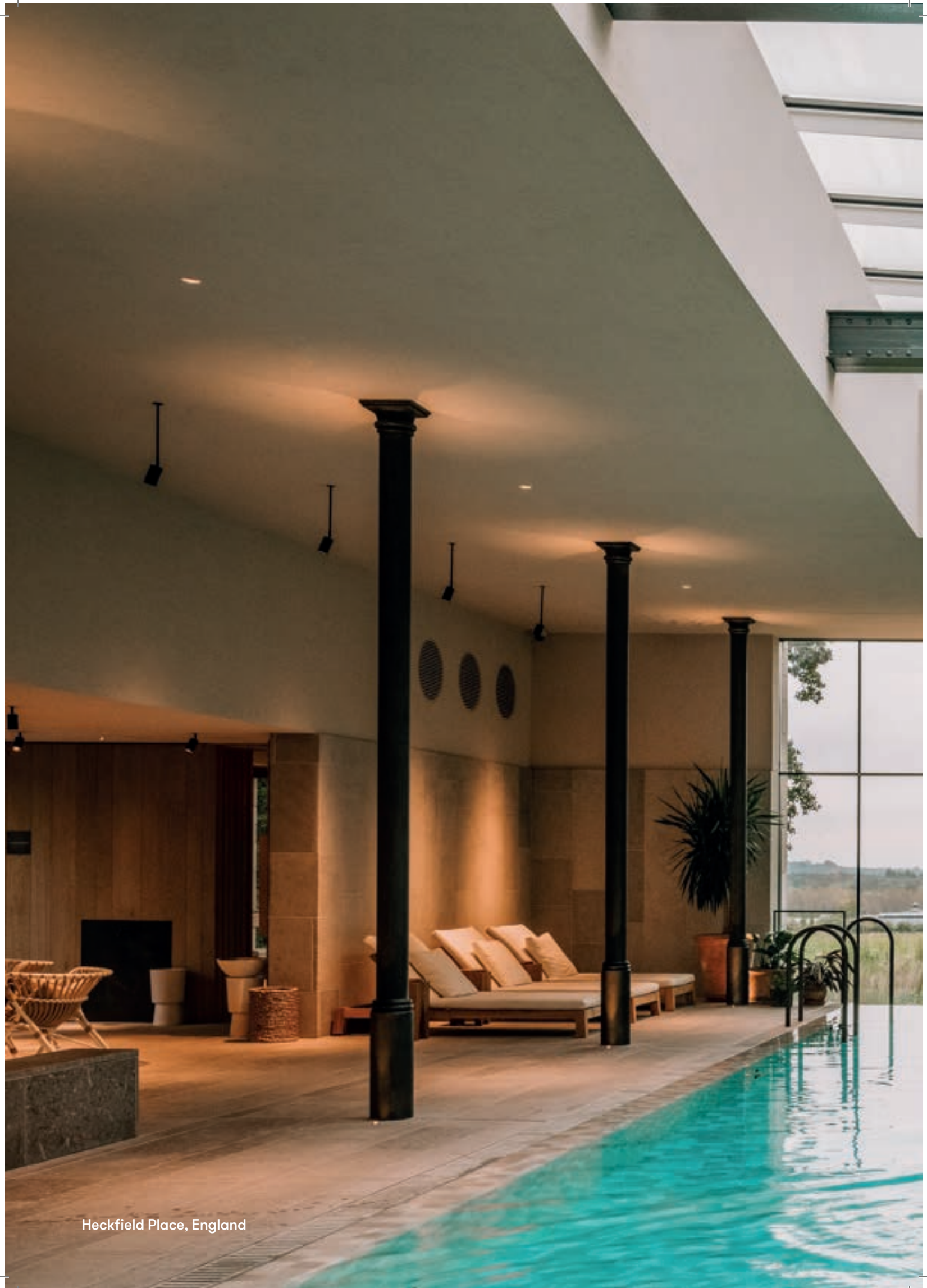
Also included is craniosacral work, which feels blissfully cossetting; while a session of reflexology will have you soaring in the sky to meet the birds you can hear. If, like me, you've ever veered away from abdominal massage, then think again. The treatment also includes this, and, instead of feeling intrusive, it did wonders for relieving tension, almost sending me to sleep.

For a more in-depth wellness experience, The Bothy offers Bespoke Paths - hyper-personalised journeys that tend to nourish all parts of the greater whole - mind, body and self - over three nights and four days. Designed by Emma Soum, The Bothy's Wellbeing Curator, they are intended as a deep dive into self-discovery and healing, and include at least five hours of therapies each day.

One week before arrival, guests have a one-to-one assessment, of both mind and body, by The Bothy's resident psychologist, Amy Steadman. From here, the team can craft bespoke sessions, with the aim being "to facilitate positive change that begins in the mind and flows through the body." From naturopathy sessions, which cover nutritional learning and herbal medicine, to cold water immersion for an instant reboot - the available therapies tap into a wide variety of concerns. Your journey might include a Radical Botany Facial for skin issues, for instance, or an osteopathy session, to increase joint mobility.

Meanwhile, to nurture the body further, there are inventive plant-based dishes, with a focus on microbiome health, on offer in The Bothy's Sun Room; or you can dine on ingredients harvested at Home Farm at the Green Michelin-starred Marle. Whether you visit at the height of summer or in the dead of winter, Heckfield Place is bursting with life. The Bothy harnesses this energy and passes it on to those looking for deep and true healing. Even when the days are short and the light is little, you'll leave with a spring in your step.





Heckfield Place, England

