

Where to stay



UK
ESCAPES

Left, the bar at The William Cecil. Right, Kit Kemp. Below: Firmdale's Number Sixteen Hotel; the entrance hall of Kemp's London home



HIGH KEMP

'I try to get someone who is usually totally uninterested in their surroundings to think, "That's fantastic."' **Kit Kemp** has always liked to create drama in her hotels. Brave new pieces of British contemporary art ("such a vibrant thing") and a love of colour and pattern are hallmarks of Kemp's style at **Firmdale Hotels**, the trailblazing company she launched with her husband Tim in London in 1985, 'because I disliked the cellophane-wrapped, corporate feel here'. That style is now captured in a fabric collection for Chelsea Textiles, rug designs for Christopher Farr and her first ever interiors book. It's enough to keep the designer of an eight-strong group (seven hotels in London and one in New York) busy. And yet now there's another Manhattan property in the pipeline ('on 56th Street, between 5th and 6th Avenues'), and a massive London project, **Ham Yard**, involving a 100-room space bigger than the group's existing Soho Hotel. There's even an avenue running through the middle, a spa, shops, a tiny theatre and a bowling alley with 'giant Howard Hodgkins on the walls'. Can't wait.

SALLY SHALAM
'A Living Space' by
Kit Kemp (Hardie
Grant Books,
£30) is out now

The William Cecil, Lincolnshire

WHAT IS IT? Three handsome, 18th-century townhouses built in Lincolnshire limestone on the edge of a peaceful old wool town at the Burghley Estate. The hotel has 27 rooms with endearingly wonky floors, some modest and tucked under the eaves, others large and airy with rows of sash windows. There's a smart little bar, a conservatory for afternoon tea and a suntrap terrace.

BEHIND THE SCENES Previously The Lady Anne's Hotel, it was revamped in July 2011 by Hillbrooke Hotels, a young group that takes on picturesque old buildings and injects 'quirky luxury'. Deliciously fig-scented incense burns nightly; cupcakes wink at you from dainty stands; and your key is attached to a wooden turtle – a tribute to the unfortunate creatures whose skulls decorate the Elizabethan kitchen at nearby Burghley House, and testimony to their soupy end.

SLEEP The bedroom names relate to Burghley House: Capability Brown after its famous garden designer; Pride and Prejudice after the Keira Knightley film shot there; Sarah Hoggins, the 10th Earl's commoner wife. The look is one of modern simplicity embellished with rich, vaguely colonial flourishes (much of the furniture is from India). There are fluffy, puffy duvets and pillows, embroidered throws in jewel colours and vintage-style wallpapers. Our

bathroom was huge with a rain shower and free-standing porcelain bath.

EAT The wood-panelled restaurant is subtly lit with low-hanging copper lights; there are logs stacked in the fireplace and 18th-century satirical cartoons on the walls. We were delighted with the chicken and prosciutto terrine with hazelnuts, the grilled lemon sole smothered in brown shrimps and samphire, and the *mmmm*-inducing peanut butter and pumpkin ice creams. At breakfast we bypassed the 'hangover drinks' (Bloody Good Mary)

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and tucked into fruit salad and pastries, followed by fabulous eggs Benedict.

WHO GOES THERE? There were three dressed-up couples staying when we visited, clearly on a treat weekend away. Wedding parties are also quite common.

WHAT'S THERE TO DO? Burghley House, with its Italian-frescoed ceilings and beautiful sculptures, is the big draw and only a 20-minute walk via a secret gate.

WE LIKE The young staff were smiley and chatty, yet professional and on the ball.

WE DON'T LIKE The free Wi-Fi signal was temperamental and there was a lack of surfaces for all your bits 'n' bobs.

THE PRICE Doubles from £110 **KATE LAUER**

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