

7 THE OLDE BELL **Hurley, Berkshire**

Hurley's stone cottages are the colour of old gold, rambling with roses and glossy with yews, and the gaps between the hedges offer glimpses of the Thames coursing regally down to Henley. Its 12th-century coaching inn has always been pretty as a picture and this summer the designer Ilse Crawford took over, intent on bringing to it a touch of the style she introduced to Babington House.

A warning, though: the chintz is still in the process of being chucked, so ask for a revamped room (to date, they've made over numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 11). These are fuss-free and spacious, using lots of tasteful rush matting and touches such as rocking chairs softened with lambswool throws.

The restaurant, presided over by the exuberant Rosie Sykes and Tony Abarno, formerly chef at the award-winning Anchor & Hope in central London, has stable-style banquettes and a pig's-head starter. Scrummy.

Doubles from £125, B&B; 01628 825881, www.theoldebells.co.uk

8 THE BATH ARMS **Horningsham, Wiltshire**

The hotelier Christoph Brooke and the designer Miv Watts — mother of the Hollywood actress Naomi — make a formidable duo. Together, they have given an impressively modern twist to this quintessentially English inn.

The emphasis is on quirky rather than quaint, as the names of the 15 shabby-chic bedrooms (Geisha, English Eccentric, Peacock) suggest. The public bar now has a zinc counter and wrought-iron tables — but you can still have a game of skittles. And the restaurant is commendably down-to-earth. The Bath Arms happily declares: "It's not our ambition to get Michelin stars." Instead, it concentrates on game, fish and offal, with a pledge that the main ingredients come from within a 50-mile radius.

Doubles from £80, B&B;

01985 844308, www.batharms.co.uk

9 THE PEAT SPADE INN **Longstock, Hampshire**

The gorgeous green folds of the Test Valley, sidling between Winchester and Salisbury, harbour one of the world's best fly-fishing rivers and one of its loveliest village inns. The Peat Spade revels in traditional country pursuits: its walls are weighed down with more stuffed wildlife than the average taxidermist's shop, and the pub has resident shooting and fishing guides.

The owners, Andrew Clark and Lucy Townsend, are ex-Hotel du Vin, as you can tell from the quality of the furnishings and the confident styling in the six bedrooms, which feature warm colours, tartan throws and smart shower rooms. The couple recently opened the Anchor Inn in Lower Froyle, Hampshire, another bastion of bygone Englishness,