

To Market, With a Cutting-Edge Cast

A redesigned farm is now a gallery and hotel, bringing new life to a small English village.

By CHRISTINE AJUDUA

A few weeks ago, the Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf, who helped create the just-completed High Line in New York, could be found on the outskirts of Bruton, England — a small market town in the South Somerset countryside, a few hours down from London — unveiling another unlikely commission.

Here, on the once-derelict five-acre Durslade Farm, is **Hauser & Wirth Somerset** (hauserwirthsomerset.com), a project from the Swiss gallerists Iwan and Manuela Wirth. After turning a nearby farm into their family home, they developed this one as a contemporary gallery and arts center.

With more than 32,000 visitors since its July inauguration, the site is bringing new life to an ancient backwater. Compared with London, New York and Zurich, where sister galleries are located — and even with Somerset's Unesco World Heritage city of Bath or Glastonbury, with its music festival — Bruton (population 2,900) has hardly been more than a speck on the map.

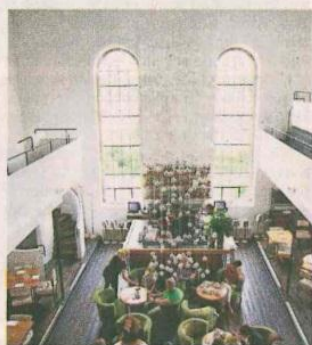
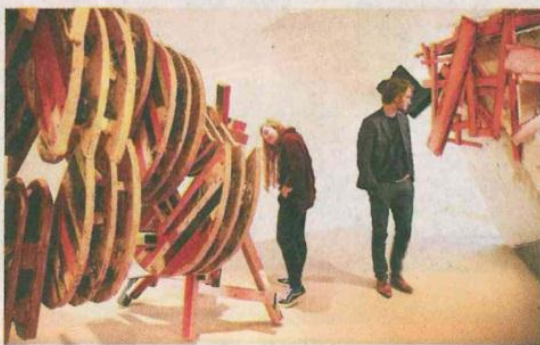
"It was a fortunate accident which drew me to this place," John Steinbeck wrote during a 1959 stay while doing research on King Arthur, believed to have reamed the county. Today, with its roofless 16th-century dovecote overlooking the River Brue Valley and a narrow high street crammed with hamstone houses, restaurants and bric-a-brac shops, Bruton is a magnet for creatives. British Vogue has called it "the new Notting Hill."

The Somerset conservation architects Benjamin + Beauchamp and the Paris-based architecture firm Laplace have restored the Durslade Farm buildings, some dating from 1760. The threshing barn and piggery have become exhibition spaces, the engine room will be a farm shop, and the farmhouse (three nights from £1,500, about \$2,375 at \$1.58 to the pound) now has six colorful bedrooms and site-specific installations by the artists Guillermo Kuitca and Pipilotti Rist.

Sculptures referencing the rural surroundings (like a giant Louise Bourgeois spider) dot the cloistered courtyard, designed by Mr. Oudolf. He planted 26,000 perennials throughout the larger landscaped meadow, with a pond and walking paths. Local specialists are invited to host workshops on creating herbal tinctures and hand-felting wool.

According to Alice Workman, director of Hauser & Wirth Somerset, most collaborators are from the region. "The place and the people here kind of created what we've created," she said. "And, you know, the whole area is thriving."

At the Chapel (atthechapel.co.uk), a Victorian Congregational church turned up-



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scale restaurant — plus bakery, lounge, wine shop and eight minimalist-chic guest rooms (from £100) — is the modern village well (literally, too: there's one in the undercroft, 30 feet deep). Regulars include photographer-filmmaker Sam Taylor-Johnson and Céline designer Phoebe Philo.

The Wirths asked the restaurant's owners to run their new gallery's restaurant in Durslade Farm's old cowsheds. Its menu sources vegetables from the garden and livestock from the farm, and the bar doubles as an art installation incorporating agricultural objects from the property. Fridays it stays open late with live local music.

Bruton favorites such as **Matt's Kitchen** (mattskitchen.co.uk) — a B.Y.O. supper club in a tiny Georgian cottage, home of the self-taught chef Matt Watson — have never been busier. The couple behind the home and antiques shop **Phillips & Skinner** (phillipsandskinner.com), which helped furnish Hauser & Wirth Somerset's farm-

house, recently created the one-bedroom **Wing** (thewingbruton.co.uk; £120), handcrafted from cedar.

Nearby in the village of Mells, former executives from Soho House and its country outpost, Babington House, have taken over the 500-year-old **Talbot Inn** (talbotinn.com; from £95). It reopened last year, housing eight rustic-luxe bedrooms and a vaulted, candlelit grill room where "locally shot" roe deer (£19) is cooked over an open fire.

The Talbot Inn's owners are planning another pub-with-rooms a few miles away in Frome (pronounced froom), whose cobblestoned St. Catherine's quarter is becoming a shopping draw for all things retro and quirky. Among a fresh crop of boutiques: the three-level **Lark Vintage** (larkvintage.co.uk), with its 20th-century couture and kitchen full of kitsch, and the atelier of the animal-loving artisan **Mary Kilvert** (marykilvert.com), who creates woolly sheep sculptures.

Clockwise from top left, Matt's Kitchen; Bruton looks over the River Brue Valley; At the Chapel is a church turned restaurant; viewing art at Hauser & Wirth Somerset; pizza, At the Chapel; waiting outside the Phillips & Skinner antiques shop.

There's a "suitcase sale" atop Catherine Hill on the first Sunday of each month (think of trinkets sold out of a secondhand pram) and a vinyl-only "mobile disco" in an old laundry truck nicknamed **Donna Somerset** — both part of the new **Frome Independent** (thefromeindependent.org.uk; March to December), which sees thousands of people flood car-free streets for everything from regional ciders and Cheddars to origami-paper bow ties.

Celebrities are reportedly looking to buy in the area — and property rates are rising. Still, residents seem to be enjoying the spotlight. An octogenarian artist named Juanita Jain recounted the filming of "Chocolat" at Durslade Farm, pre-Hauser & Wirth, when owned by her friend, the late Trevor Gilling. She described him as an unassuming man, much like his hometown. "He never went out into the world," she said. "And now, the world's come to him!"