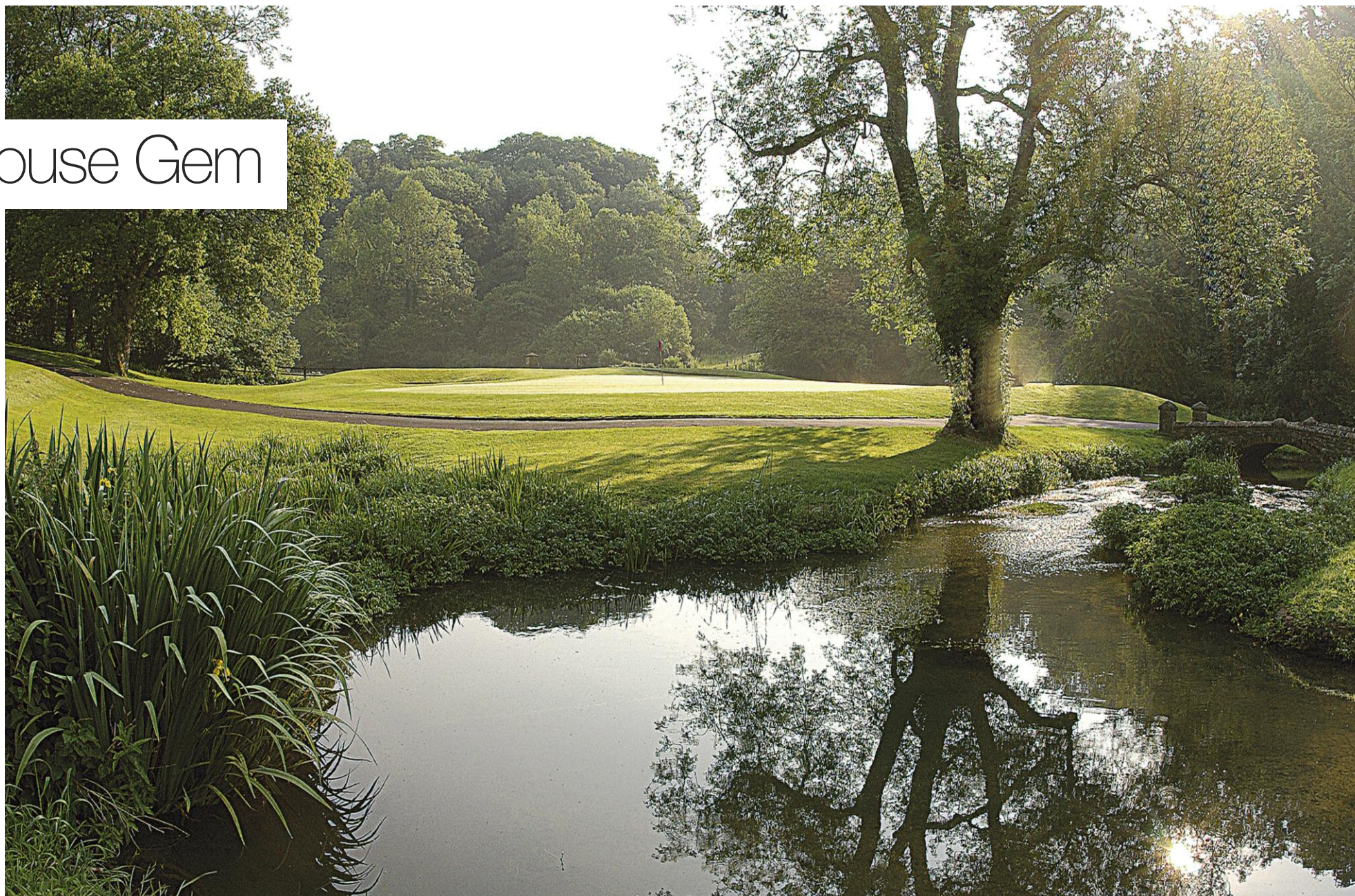


MANOR HOUSE GOLF & HOTEL CASTLE COMBE, WILTSHIRE

# A Country House Gem

England's green and pleasant land has umpteen boutique country house hotels with rather ordinary courses, and conversely, any number of excellent clubs associated with mediocre but expensive hostelries. For Peter Swain, both course and hospitality at the Manor House Hotel and Golf Club tick the quality and value tee boxes



Situated in the picturesque Bybrook valley minutes from the time-warped village of Castle Combe, the Manor House course enjoys an undulating parkland setting over which the design team of Peter Alliss and Clive Clark created a fabulously challenging test of golf. The hotel itself is the definitive country retreat with its stylish furnishings, exposed beams and grand four-poster beds.



WITH A SCENIC 18 HOLES MEANDERING through the rolling Cotswold countryside, a sensibly priced but still sumptuously appointed 48-room hotel dating from 14th century and Michelin-starred food, the Manor House in the time-warped village of Castle Combe in Wiltshire is something of a hidden gem.

After playing the Peter Alliss and Clive Clark-designed set-up recently, Luke Donald said: "The Manor House Golf Club is a truly stunning course and I will definitely be coming back." My game may not quite be on a par with the world number one's, but after visiting the parkland club in June, I'm inclined to agree.

Having first played here 10 years earlier, I was pleasantly surprised that, even in these recessionary times, the condition of the course is still immaculate. And the Pecorelli family, who own the establishment, are constantly investing in im-



provements, starting at the 1st.

Instead of a dogleg round the trees, the tee shot now requires a 220-yard carry over water and what was once a mott and bailey fortification to reach the fairway. Easy enough on, say, the 8th, but it's something of a buttock-clencher as the first shot of the day right in front of the members' terrace.

On the par-three 2nd, you discover what a fine piece of golfing topography this is. From an elevated tee up in the woods, you look down on a smallish green surrounded by the Bybrook stream and bunkers. It's only 151 yards long, but the 100-foot drop and a swirling wind make club selection exceptionally tricky.

Not particularly long, the design of this set-up calls for accuracy and skillful course management. Without planes, trains or cars to interrupt the birdsong, the five par-3s and five 5s provide

good variety, and a couple of the shorter par-4s are reachable for long hitters.

I like the 498-yard par-five 12th, which demands a good 3-wood off the elevated tee to a plateau fairway, followed by solid hybrid or 3-iron over the wooded valley up onto the other side. The small two-tier green, protected by six bunkers, deters all but the most determined approach shots.

The handsome 18th, with an Eisenhower tree on the fairway and a skinny green flanked by water, makes for a great finishing hole. A USGA-spec driving range and short game area, halfway house, refreshment cart, new electric buggies and a friendly clubhouse complete the exemplary package.

Close by the 18th green, the new Waterfall Lodge, which sleeps eight, provides an ideal base for a small group of friends or visiting golf societies.

The Virginia creeper-clad hotel itself has several leathery snugs, a good collection of single malts, ancient-beamed bedrooms, spacious cottage suites and, in the Michelin-starred Bybrook restaurant, the perfect venue for a celebratory dinner. **B**

**FACT BOX: Manor House Hotel & Golf Club**

Where: Just off J17 of the M4, near Bath

How much: In Waterfall Lodge, from £109 per person for 36 holes, bed, breakfast and dinner in the clubhouse. In the hotel, from £155 per person, based on two sharing, for two rounds with dinner in the Bybrook. Green fees from £59.

Contact: 01249 782982, manorhousegolf.co.uk part of Exclusive Golf