



# ESCAPE DUN ALUINN

Book into this elegant Perthshire bolthole for luxurious pampering in gorgeously stylish surroundings

Photography Fran Mart Words Miriam Methuen-Jones

**V**ery occasionally, you come across a place that gives you a glimpse into another world, and you wonder if people actually live like this. It turns out, yes, some do. Luxury travel covers a broad spectrum, but the sector in general has a focus on personalisation, along

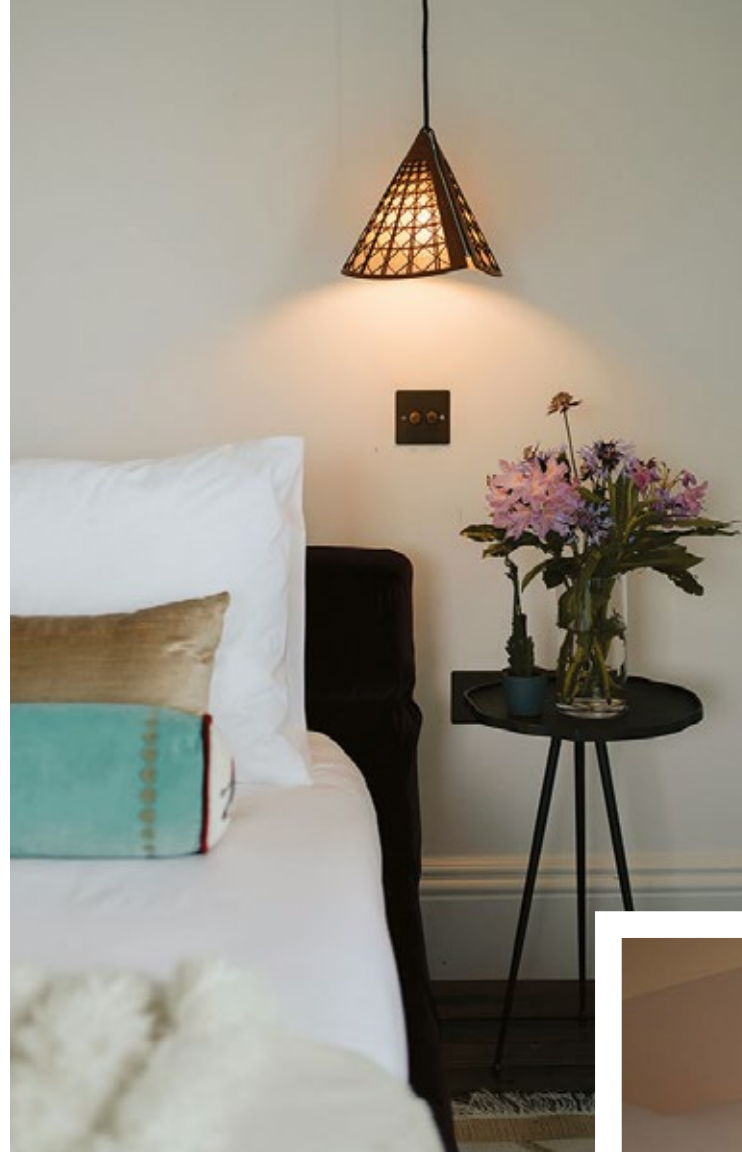
with mental and physical well-being. Dun Aluinn is Perthshire's answer to this need for indulgence. From the moment you step through the doors, you're spoiled rotten – but there's nothing about this exclusive-use holiday house that feels pretentious, not even when we're greeted by our well-dressed butler, Alister, who gives us a tour of the Victorian building. Since it's just the two of us to stay (it can accommodate a party of 18), we have the pick of the nine bedrooms. Each one has its own unique yet cohesive style. Mine has a Japanese soaking tub in the corner and panoramic views out over the hills. ▶



## IN THE AREA

Considering its tranquillity, there's a surprising amount to do in nearby **Aberfeldy**. **The Watermill** is a great lunch spot to grab a bite and to pick up a new book to read in the hot tub. **Three Lemons** is another tasty option for pizza, home baking and more if you fancy leaving the comfort of the house. Throw on your hiking boots (or a fairly robust pair of trainers in my case) and head for the **Birks**. There's a pretty path leading up to the waterfall and looping down again – a treat if you're a fan of Robert Burns. And don't miss a trip to the **Dewar's distillery**. Conveniently, it's a brief stroll from Dun Aluinn so no designated driver is required. Mention to John that you plan to go and you might be lucky enough to enjoy a drink or two in the Secret Bar... **Highland safaris, fishing, barbecues, guided walks and personalised picnics** can all be arranged by Dun Aluinn when you organise your stay.

**[Top]** The Victorian house looks imposing as you drive up, but the interior has been designed to offer a real sense of comfort. **[Top right]** Each bedroom is thoughtfully decorated, right down to the finishing touches. These leather lampshades were found by Susie on a visit to Maison&Objet in Paris. They are handmade by LuLé Studio in Amiens, France. **[Right]** The Kirami wood-fired hot tub imported from Finland is a romantic spot in which to enjoy a dram or a glass of wine while gazing out over the hills. **[Far right]** The spectacular 5.5m-long bronze and oak table was designed by Susie and can seat twenty diners. **[Previous page]** A B&B Italia sofa in statement orange encourages pre-dinner cocktails and immediately invites you to lounge



Later, over a home-cooked meal (the catering is usually provided by near-neighbours Ballintaggart Farm), John Burke, Dun Aluinn's co-owner, explains that the building has been through many incarnations over the years, and was a school boarding house at one stage back in the 1900s. When he and wife Susie Whyte purchased the place, it needed a great deal of love and attention to give it the kind of refined luxury it has today.

The panelling in the main room, for example, has been painstakingly restored. A fireplace in the front living room has similarly been reinstated to show off its original brilliant blue hue. Once the careful restoration had taken place, Susie, a successful interior designer and architect, was given free rein. The table we are seated at, a 5.5m-long work of art, was

her brainchild. The legs and frame are made from bronze and it's topped with oak. It's thought to be the longest bronze table in the world and can comfortably seat twenty. It's also a good example of the attitude at Dun Aluinn: the decision to leave the metal as it was cast, rather than opting for a fancy finish, prevents it being too intimidating. Even the legs were considered, spaced out in such a way that no one is left awkwardly straddling metal while they eat. The table is grand in theory, but it puts functionality first, inviting you to relax and enjoy a bit of chaos at mealtimes.

Similarly, Alister, our quietly attentive butler, graciously accepts an invitation to sit and have an after-dinner drink with us and a good natter. This appealing contrast of grandeur meets familiarity sums up the Dun Aluinn experience.

John and Susie have spared no expense in perfecting the details of this gorgeous house. Even its scent was carefully chosen (a Teatro Fragranze Uniche home fragrance mixes headily with the gentle smell of firewood). The en-suites all have underfloor heating (one even has a steam room...) and the mudroom is designed so your coat hangs warming above a reclaimed heating grate. There has been a conscious effort to create zones for larger gatherings but there are also places to convene in secret conversation or to curl up snugly with a book.

The following morning, at John's suggestion, we set out after breakfast for the nearby waterfall. It is a steep clamber up the gorge of the Moness burn, but well worth the sweat. Dotted along the path are reminders of the Robert Burns song 'The Birks of Aberfeldy', which was inspired by the birch trees and the Falls of Moness. If you're not the outdoorsy type, never fear – I managed the route in inappropriately bright white trainers, and the descent is markedly easier.

Again on John's suggestion, we strolled through Aberfeldy, stopping for a bite to eat and then continuing on to the nearby Dewar's distillery. I'm not a whisky connoisseur, so I didn't really know what to expect, but the tour was fantastic. It turns out I have a nose for whisky – who knew? And, just in case the regular tour wasn't special enough, John had phoned ahead and we ended up being smuggled into a secret area of the distillery. I won't divulge any more, but believe me when I say it's worth a visit, even if you're a gin-lover like me...

What better way to finish our stay than with a starlit dip in the wood-fired hot tub? It sits hidden down a wild path beside the house and has a phenomenal view over the hills. We submerged ourselves in the gently steaming water, with Dun Aluinn glowing beside us, hardly believing this was real life. ■