

Gamefield

*Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands
put his thoughts down as he puts his feet up at one
of Scotland's premier destinations*





I'm not good at relaxing, but after a hectic holiday season, the idea of chilling out with my family at a Highland retreat seemed rather attractive.

Perthshire is a favourite location of mine, so when Gamefield on the Ochertyre Estate near Crieff became an option for a few days of self-catering luxury, it wasn't a difficult decision to make. In no time at all the car was packed and we were off.

It was late afternoon when the remote-controlled entrance gates to Gamefield parted. My first impression was a definite sense of having arrived at somewhere special. Gamefield is large, but not ostentatious - it is secluded, inviting and homey. Architect-designed as a family home for local businessman and property developer William Frame, it was completed in 2002. As his property portfolio expanded, Frame and his wife Wendy created a new home on the Ochertyre Estate retaining Gamefield as an exclusive, luxury, five-star self-catering property. When I asked Frame why he had chosen to settle at Ochertyre his answer was instant: "It is a real gem of a place, teeming with wildlife and just a great place to recharge your batteries at any time of year." This was exactly why we had come and I was about to put it to the test.

Frame's mother-in-law, Audrey Bruce, acts as concierge, meeting and greeting guests arriving at Gamefield. Dusk was descending, and with a warm glow emanating from the open front door, Bruce welcomed us into a spacious hall with a roaring log fire and flickering candles. Bedecked with beautiful furniture and stunning paintings - a theme consistent throughout the house - it was apparent that this was at the top end of the self-catering market. The chill of outside evaporated as we were given a guided tour of the property.

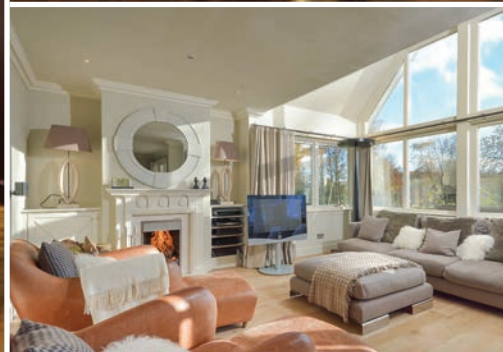
We started in the large, fully fitted kitchen complete with a casual dining arrangement for all ten guests that the house can

accommodate. It is warmed by an AGA cooker as well as the under-floor central heating system and the many open fires throughout the house. We were not going to be cold. Off the kitchen is a utility room with full laundry facilities and a separate cloakroom.

The aroma of brewing coffee hung in the air as we progressed to the TV lounge, followed by the dining room with its purpose-built oak table and seating for twelve guests, and to a further wing providing access to a large sitting room, double bedroom and bathroom. Everything exuded quality. There are huge picture windows and glazed walls throughout, but with darkness falling, the outside views would have to wait until morning.

Ascending the sweeping curved staircase to the first floor revealed four spacious bedrooms, one of which is designed as a private suite, while the others have superb en-suite facilities. The master bedroom is stunning, and several hours and a couple of whiskies later, I slid into the huge bed with its luxurious duvet and Egyptian linen sheets to begin my quest to master the art of relaxation.

I awoke the following morning, reluctantly got out of bed, showered and dressed to gentle music from the home sound system before opening the curtains on a frost encrusted dawn. The garden is big, and my gaze wandered over the ice-sprinkled lawn before alighting on a Scandinavian style summerhouse complete with outdoor hot tub. As I wandered through the house, opening curtains I realized that everything about Gamefield is spacious, light and airy with a wonderful relationship between interior and exterior spaces. This is a great place for family gatherings and special occasions. With a lawn large enough to accommodate a marquee, it is also a perfect location for a Scottish wedding. There is even a separate Indie House providing a further two bedrooms if necessary. After breakfast, and still not able to sit and



do nothing, I explored the garden and surroundings before setting out to investigate what else the area could offer.

We headed for the nearby, world-famous Gleneagles Hotel with its 232 bedrooms, including 26 suites. Its many awards include 'Best Golf Resort in the World,' 'Top Ranked UK Hotel' and 'Best Hotel in Scotland'. Once referred to as 'the eighth wonder of the world', the Gleneagles resort is internationally renowned for its outstanding golf courses, but it also offers many other outdoor sporting pursuits along with indoor tennis. These all sounded much too energetic, so we opted for lunch in the calm surroundings of the Mediterranean-style Deseo restaurant. We shared some tapas; deep fried Padrón peppers, and morcilla - a tasty Spanish black pudding with pimento and egg and gordal olives with orange, chilli and rosemary. I followed this with gamberi linguine. As I savoured the outstanding flavours I noted the entrance to the ESPA spa. It, too, had received numerous accolades including 'Best UK Luxury Resort Spa'. Surely, there could be no better place to advance my relaxation studies.

Having allowed enough time to digest lunch, I booked in for the Serenity Treatment at the hands of ESPA Life wellness practitioner, Anna Smilowska.

Smilowska explained that after gaining her initial qualifications in Poland, she had spent time in Asia acquiring additional skills that formed part of the Serenity Treatment she had personally developed. I am no connoisseur of body and face oils, but when I was presented with the choice of oils that we could use, I was amazed at how rich and luxurious they were. I made my selection and for the next two hours I was massaged - although that barely describes the sensational muscle manipula-

tion that I experienced - and almost had an out-of-body experience with the amazing cranio-sacral therapy before drifting off as the warm liquids of the Shirodhara treatment enveloped my forehead. As I floated towards seventh heaven, Smilowska held onto my feet and completed the treatment with some Thai reflexology. It took me several hours to reunite body and soul, and as I reclined in Gamefield's hot tub later that evening, I looked up at a dark starry sky and still wasn't sure if I had succeeded.

The following day I embraced the sofa and a good book before we headed out in the evening to dine. With several superb restaurants in the area, a stay at Gamefield gives you the chance to sample the very best of Scottish cuisine. We opted for Barley Bree, a former coach house in the conservation village of Muthill. It is the creation of husband and wife team Alison and Fabrice Bouteloup. As one might expect from a French-trained chef and his wine-connoisseur wife, it was an outstanding experience. We were presented with cauliflower soup with caraway seeds and smoked fish bonbon as an amuse-bouche. I chose the seared hand-dived scallop and fennel gravadlax for a starter and guinea fowl suprême with cabbage and chestnut to follow. Our choice of wine was a Château Cissac, 2011, Haut Médoc, Cru Bourgeois. Its silky texture with plum, cedar and briar notes complimented the culinary delights of the 'auld alliance'. Evidently, my journey of relaxation was also one of cultural fusion. I finished with a selection of cheese and biscuits and a Balvenie Doublewood malt whisky. Complimenting Alison Bouteloup on an evening par excellence and querying what brought her to Muthill she explained, "We looked at properties all over Scotland, but Perthshire has everything - walks, activities and great

produce. There is a huge difference in the produce available from when we arrived in Scotland twenty years ago - there is much more on offer and the quality has vastly improved." I couldn't agree more.

Over the next few days, the nearest I got to exercise was giving my taste buds further workouts at the Glenturret Distillery in Crieff and The Highland Chocolatier at Grandtully. The Glenturret Distillery dates back to 1775 and is the oldest working distillery in Scotland. The Glenturret malt is an important constituent of Scotland's Famous Grouse whisky, and The Famous Grouse Experience is a five-star visitor attraction offering distillery tours and whisky tastings. You can even participate in the Bottle Your Own experience launched by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on a visit in 2014. The Highland Chocolatier also offers a visitor tasting experience. If you think you enjoy chocolate, then think again because what you consume is probably comprised of sugars, added fats and emulsifiers. The Highland Chocolatier produces chocolates made from a single origin cocoa from the volcanic island of São Tomé, infused with exotic spices and highly sought after by Michelin Star chefs. It is the confectionary equivalent of an outstanding malt whisky.

Back in Gamefield I poured a Glenturret Sherry Edition malt and unwrapped a Raspberry and Black Pepper truffle. I savoured both before crossing the dewy lawn for a final dip in the hot tub. Feeling wonderfully relaxed I looked at Andromeda sparkling overhead and I knew that our sojourn at Gamefield had indeed just revealed a small corner of heaven.

www.gamefield.co.uk
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