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Grand slam

Kim and Andy Murray open the doors of their rejuvenated hotel Cromlix, a “country home, not a country house”

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Game, set, match

Andy Murray's hotel has undergone a dramatic refurbishment. *Amanda Afifa* sees the property's new look as the tennis star's family take a more hands-on approach

Just a few miles from historic Dunblane, Stirling Castle and Bannockburn, and surrounded by magnificent forestry, sits Cromlix. Built in the early 1900s as a country house, but converted into a hotel in 1981, the Perthshire estate, which sprawls 34 acres of secluded woodland and landscaped gardens, is perfectly placed for any number of leisure activities. But is particularly well known for its fishing, archery, Wimbledon-inspired tennis courts, spectacular walks and, of course, its owners. This year, the handsome property marks 10 years under the ownership of British professional tennis ace Sir Andy Murray and his artist wife Kim. And 2023 signifies quite the anniversary.

Having parted company with Inverloch Castle Management International (ICMI), which included a partnership with Chez Roux, at the end of last year – a successful collaboration that lasted the length of the Murrays' ownership – Cromlix has uncovered a new look, a new vibe, and a new management team.

With the shortest of turnarounds – a mere 10 weeks – Cromlix reopened on 21 March, revealing its first phase in a series of planned updates. The refurbishment was masterminded by Kim, who worked hand-in-hand with Belfast-based interior designer Suzanne Garuda, an International Hotel & Property



The drawing room

"It's such a nice, vibrant space"

Barry Makin

Awards winner. The pair had recently completed the Murrays' home in Surrey – built from scratch and five years in the making – while Garuda's commercial work includes numerous projects with the Dalata Group of Hotels, the first UK NYX hotel in London's Holborn, the Midland hotel in Manchester, and the Grand Opera House in Belfast.

The results are striking, with the new design eschewing traditional neutral tones and tartan in place of bold, vibrant wallpapers



Thyme bathroom

and fabrics. It delivers an elegant, feminine, and, critically, unpretentious atmosphere, with plush sofas and cushions from Designers Guild, Warner House, Linwood and Oka encouraging comfort and calming qualities.

"I am so proud of it all," enthuses Kim, who oversaw every element of the new-look 15 bedrooms, Gateside Lodge, 50-seat Glasshouse restaurant, bar, private dining rooms and meeting rooms. "It has been a mammoth project and an enormous effort by a lot of people, and it is everything I hoped it would be."

When she embarked on the project, she had a vision of what she wanted. "And that was to make the hotel feel luxurious but comfortable, contemporary but classic – and I think it does that really well," explains Kim. She believes that, together with her husband Andy, they have put their stamp on the property "with a bit of fun and some personal items" such as the artwork on the walls, mostly on loan

The history of Cromlix

Cromlix Cottage, as the house was first known, was built by Captain Arthur Drummond in 1874, but just four years later, the house was destroyed by a fire. Only the chapel, badly damaged, survived, and, in doing so, will be 150 years old next year.

In 1880 it was rebuilt to the same design, with the rustic style of the dining room, library and lack of any grand staircase is in keeping with the 'cottage' theme.

Colonel Arthur Hay Drummond (nephew of Captain Arthur Drummond) became the laird of Cromlix just before 1900. The colonel completed the enlargement of the house as it now stands in 1903. The porch was a later addition. Colonel Hay Drummond landscaped the gardens

and grounds and employed up to 12 permanent gardeners.

The house was converted from a private residence to a luxury country house hotel in 1981.

At the start of 2013, Andy Murray purchased Cromlix, situated near his hometown of Dunblane, to help attract new visitors to the area. After an extensive refurbishment, Cromlix opened on 1 April 2014 with bedrooms named after Scottish heroes such as Sir Chris Hoy, Sir Sean Connery, and Sir Alex Ferguson.

Cromlix was refurbished once again in January 2023 and the bedrooms were renamed after botanicals from the Scottish landscape.

PHOTOS: VERENA SPLETT



Piano area

from the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) but also from the Murrays' private collection and including four limited edition cherry blossom prints from Damien Hirst. "That was also really important to us," adds Kim.

"We really wanted people to feel like they were coming to a country home rather than a country house," she adds. "We want our guests to feel like they are able to fully relax in the hotel and unwind, while being in a beautiful setting with exceptional, personal service."

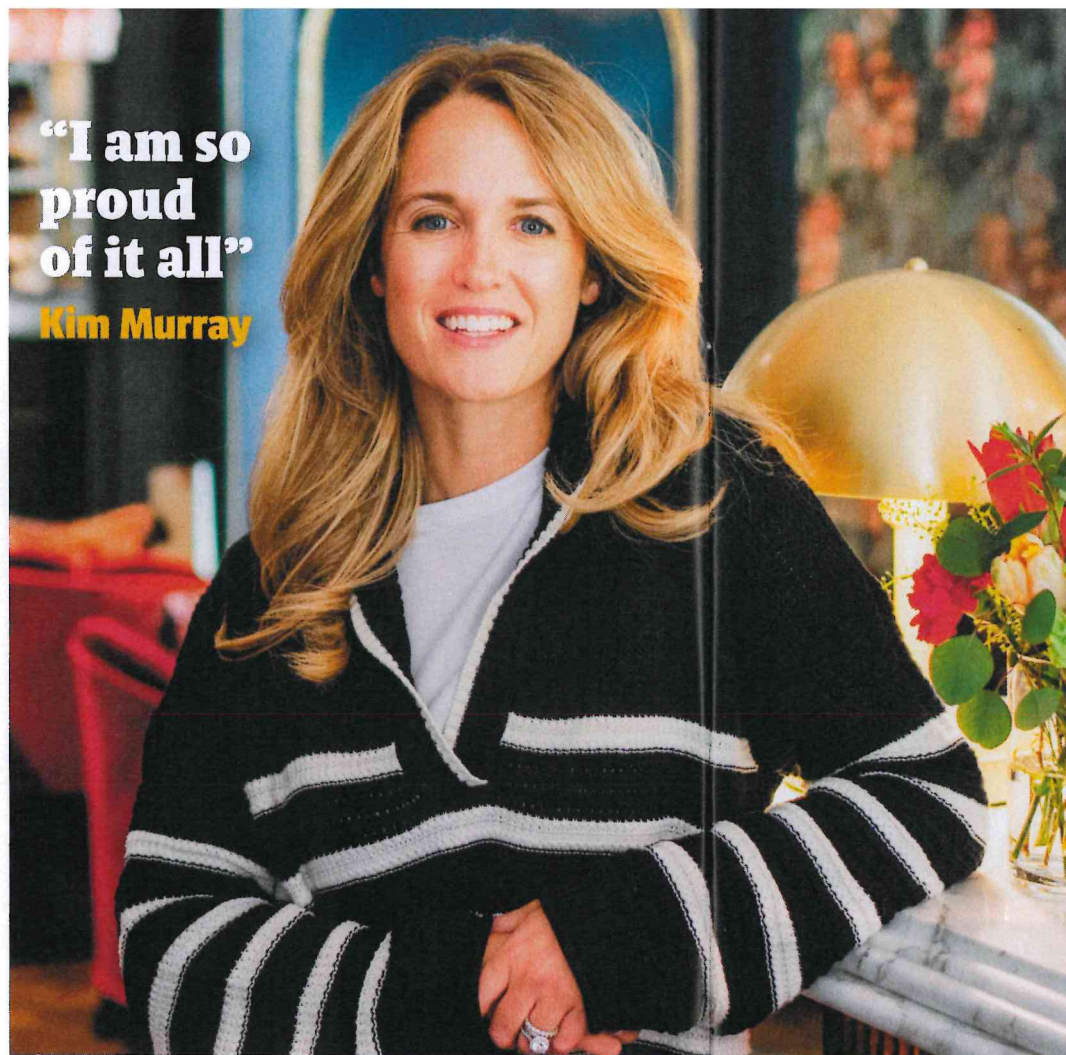
A Scottish love story

Cromlix has long been dear to the Murrays. Andy hails from nearby Dumblane and his grandparents were among the first guests to hold an event at the hotel when it opened in 1981. Andy's brother, Jamie, married in Cromlix's 19th-century chapel in 2010, and Kim and Andy wed at the property five years later.

Having owned the hotel for a decade, Kim felt the couple were reaching a pivotal stage with it. "It had been run by a management company and we needed to decide whether to carry on working with them or not. The hotel was also looking quite tired and so I just felt like it was our opportunity to take it back under our control and give it a new lease of life. I'd just had my fourth child and we'd also just finished building and designing our own house, so it was also the right time in my life to take on a project like this." Added to this, the Murrays had also recently attended Andy's grandad's 90th birthday lunch at Cromlix, where his grandad had shared with him how much the hotel meant to him and his wife.

Part of the overall vision for the property was to bring some of the outside in. "We are surrounded by some of the most stunning countryside and so we've tried to capture that inside the hotel," says Kim.

The 15 bedrooms in the main house are all now named after wildflowers and plants that can be found locally (think tulip, verberna, rosemary...), as opposed to the Scottish heroes



"I am so proud of it all"
Kim Murray

they were named after previously. "Much of the wallpaper features bold florals, and our new Glasshouse restaurant is botanically themed, and I love that," she says. "Scotland is really spectacular and it's great we are able to celebrate that here."

Influences came from all corners. As Andy stays in hotels all around the world, there were certain things that were important to him such as having top-quality mattresses (new ones have been sourced from Mattison).

"We live near Beaverbrook in Leatherhead, Surrey, and love what they have done there," Kim confides, "and their eclectic design was a bit of an inspiration, too."

And with the entire refurbishment taking place in less than three months, there was a hard deadline to meet with three weddings booked in for March. "It was a real race to the finish," Kim says.



Allium bathroom



Tulip bedroom

Makin magic

Joining the hotel at the start of that race was general manager Barry Makin, whose eclectic career includes five years in the army, three years as an engineer for the police, and then an impressive industry career at Scottish properties including Fairmont St Andrews, the Scotsman, Cameron House and Hotel Indigo. "I started on 16 January, just after the hotel had closed for refurbishment," says Makin. "I didn't actually operate under the old ICM I Cromlix, which was good because I didn't have any baggage – I was very much involved in the refurbishment and then the reopening."

Over the past six months other new appointments – in preparation for the transition to run independently – have included sales and marketing director Emily Shields, financial controller Andy Oram, revenue manager Ellidh Leishman, events manager Katy Allen, along with two reservationists, Debbie Carmichael and Claire Moreland. "I think it's testament to the owners that they are prepared to invest in that side of the business," says Makin. "We're fully self-contained now."

One of the biggest changes to Cromlix was the relocation of the reception area from the back of the property to the front. Steps up to the hotel have been removed and the area immediately in front of reception has been raised, laid with resin and landscaped to provide a grander entrance. "It's far more of an arrival to the hotel than it was before," says Makin. "You arrive and you can have the car valet parked."

An open-fronted vestibule – previously a whisky bar but now the home of a display of fresh-cut flowers and rows and rows of Barbour wellies – has been re-established as the main entrance, leading into reception through automatic doors.

Leading off reception to the back of the property is the Garden run independently – have included sales and marketing director Emily Shields, financial controller Andy Oram, revenue manager Ellidh Leishman, events manager Katy Allen, along with two reservationists, Debbie Carmichael and Claire Moreland. "I think it's testament to the owners that they are prepared to invest in that side of the business," says Makin. "We're fully self-contained now."

The footprint of the Glasshouse restaurant, overseen by executive chef Darin Campbell, hasn't changed, but new furniture has been installed and a lot more greenery has



Clematis sitting room



The drawing room

been placed around the room to “lift it”. “It’s a great space,” says Makin. “Lunch, afternoon tea and dinner are all served in this space. We have 50 covers in here, but we generally do 110-120 between the two main sittings. It’s such a nice, vibrant space.”

Farrow & Ball, Zoffany and Mylands paints were used throughout the hotel, while wallpapers were sourced from Tektura, Eijffinger (its Posy wallpaper is used in Hyssop, for example), Osborne & Little (used in the bar) and Romo. Fabrics were supplied by Liberty, Osbourne & Little, Manuel Canovas, Designers Guild, GP&J Baker, Casamance and Linwood.

New in-room products have been installed too, such as skincare brand MODM, an artisan company in Edinburgh. “The company isn’t huge and it doesn’t supply lots and lots of people, but, because of our size, we’re lucky that we can take them as a supplier. It’s gorgeous stuff,” says Makin.

Kim is particularly proud of the Drawing Room, which has “lots of different fabrics and textures, some really interesting artwork and a bright yellow ceiling, which I wasn’t sure would work, but it really does”, and of the bedrooms, she is drawn to Tulip. “I love it—I think it’s so dramatic and bold. It has a four-

poster bed, dark walls, and really sumptuous fabrics. It’s a really striking bedroom. I also love the bathroom in Allium—it’s vast and the wallpaper in there is just beautiful and you can look out of the window over the hotel’s grounds while sitting in a roll-top bath.”

Given the fact that the hotel was already fully furnished, Kim and Garuda were keen to assess every item of furniture and renovate, recover or re-use where possible. “A lot of the bedroom furniture was re-polished or re-upholstered, and anything we thought could still work within the new schemes was used. I was able to source a few antique pieces and rugs to add to them, and then the balance, mainly in the Glasshouse restaurant and bar was newly made,” says Garuda.

Brand new

As well as the interiors, Cromlix’s brand identity has also been updated, coinciding with the team’s decision to join PoB Hotels (it’s also a member of Luxury Scotland and Small Luxury Hotels). The logo has been inspired by the Virginia Creeper that embellishes the turret facade. “It’s that same vibrancy and unbridled elegance that we wanted to inject into every corner of this business,” says Kim. “I



Barry Makin



The bar



The Glasshouse restaurant

enjoyed working on the rebrand of the hotel – the whole process of putting down on paper what we wanted to convey about the hotel visually was really interesting.”

Also new to the property is music. “During the last 10 years, there was no music in the building,” says Makin, adding that a lack of sound can sometimes dampen the atmosphere and compel people to whisper. “Background music is so important to me. It just gives people the confidence to have a conversation and it makes them feel like they’re not

sitting isolated in a room. We’ve put it in everywhere, and it’s made a massive difference.”

Next on the horizon is nine luxury woodland cabins to be erected to the north of the hotel (a planning application is with Stirling Council). The cabins will range from one-bedroom tree-top options to the largest cabin, which will feature three bedrooms, a games room, rooftop terrace and a two-bedroom guest wing. Work is planned to begin this September.

“It’s very much about having them feel part of the environment,” explains Makin. “We are

very passionate about the estate being part of us and us being part of the estate, and Andy is a global ambassador of the WWF, so it’s at the forefront of our minds to make sure that our environment is looked after.”

For Kim, she has clearly relished the project and has much more in the pipeline. But could she envisage working on another hotel refurbishment in the future? “I think, for now, I’m just happy managing one hotel,” says Kim, “as well as four children, a dog, two rabbits and some chickens.”

Suzanne Garuda on recreating the interiors

Having worked closely with Kim Murray on her home in Surrey, designer Suzanne Garuda felt she entered the project at Cromlix with a bit of a head start knowing Kim’s likes and dislikes.

“Having worked so closely with Kim in designing the interiors for her family home, we had already developed a great working relationship and I had a clear understanding of her style and tastes. As a painter herself, Kim has a great understanding of composition and colour and is not afraid to be bold. This certainly made the process a lot easier. But there were a lot of other considerations that had to be made in Cromlix in terms of cost, practicalities and commercial appeal. Communication is key, so understanding the brief, the client needs and delivering that in the best possible way makes it an enormous advantage to have an established relationship and easy communication.”

Turning the project around in such a short space of time was definitely the biggest challenge for Garuda and her team of contractors (on some days there were as many as 200 on site). “It was a miracle!” she exclaims. “I still don’t know how it all managed to come together.

“The design process for 15 individual rooms and suites, en suites, corridors, three

staircases, restaurant, bar, dining room and billiard room, all completely bespoke, was already a tall order, and in an old building, we were always going to have to deal with some surprises along the way, so it was essential that we all worked closely as a team and dealt with every query and problem as it arose.”

Garuda says the team were blessed with a “wonderful” onsite project manager in Scott Morris who was able to manage all the sub-contractors as long as the information was flowing, says Garuda. “We had 10 weeks to deliver the job, and then three back-to-back weddings booked in so you can imagine that there were a lot of weekends and late nights sacrificed to complete this huge task. Ultimately, it came down to teamwork. All the many sub-contractors shared the same belief, vision and desire to deliver. Right up to the last day and hours, it still didn’t look like it was going to be finished, and in the last 12 hours it miraculously transformed from building site to luxury hotel.”

For Garuda, it’s hard for her to single out a favourite part of the project, but she does concede that working with Kim, who was so enthusiastic and passionate about the project, “so quick to make decisions and support the team, and so genuinely excited and grateful



for the effort that goes into making it happen” was important. “Also, the opportunity to breathe new life into this beautiful house, to create something so individual, enhancing the heritage, creating a different ambience and atmosphere in each of the rooms with colour, beautiful artwork and furnishings, which mark a new era in the life of Cromlix.”