

# The Star

Alfriston, East Sussex

This striking Grade II Listed 15th century building in the medieval village of Alfriston, is near the Seven Sisters and in the South Downs National Park, close to the historic town of Lewes and to both Glyndebourne Opera House and Charleston. The Star opened on 14 June 2021 after an extensive renovation with mother and daughter duo, Olga and Alex Polizzi at the helm.

‘My home is in this part of the world and I’ve always longed for the opportunity to open a hotel in Sussex. When The Star Inn came on the market, Alex and I were immediately interested in the project. We want it to be an integral part of the community and provide a welcoming environment for all, from walkers to opera goers.’ said Olga Polizzi.

Records show that The Star was originally built as two separate properties. The oldest part was constructed in 1483 as a private house for John Archer. His family were Exeter merchants, cloth traders and tavern keepers and his father was several times Mayor of that town. He then bought the adjoining property on the corner of Star Lane and the High Street and sometime thereafter opened The Star Inn as a local tavern. It is said that the tavern was used monks and pilgrims en-route from Battle Abbey to the shrine of St Richard, patron saint of Sussex, at Chichester Cathedral. The inn is steeped in fascinating history and was known as ‘The Star of Bethlehem’ until at least 1520.

The Star is located opposite the Tye or village green in Alfriston. The parish church, dedicated to St Andrew, has Saxon origins, although most of the building dates from the 14th century. It is known, because of its size, as the Cathedral of the South Downs. The 14th century Clergy House, next to it, was the first building purchased by the National Trust in 1896 and is a perfect example of a Wealden hall house with thatched roof and timber-framed walls.

The Star Inn was once a Heritage hotel - part of the Forte hotel empire owned by Olga Polizzi’s father, Charles Forte. Olga and her husband have had a house nearby for many years, and love walking both The Downs and The Seven Sisters, and the culture that East Sussex has to offer, so when the hotel came on the market in 2019 she took the opportunity to buy it with her daughter, Alex, and started extensive renovations.



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The hotel has been transformed with the addition of floor to ceiling windows through much of the more modern part of the building, and some of the smaller bedrooms have been combined to form 30 larger bedrooms. Many of the rooms in the new wing, built in the Sixties, have small private patios or Juliet balconies; one junior suite has its own terrace. The central part of the modern building was demolished to create an internal courtyard.

The Heritage Suite, on the first floor of the oldest part of the hotel, The Inn, is directly above the bar and has beautiful oriel windows looking out over the High Street. Its bathroom has a freestanding bath and a fireplace.

The bedrooms have been designed in Olga Polizzi's style, using contemporary furniture and local antiques, English wallpapers and fabrics by Richard Smith, with splashes of vibrant colours and textures. Some of the furniture in the newer Sixties wing is by Julian Chichester and other pieces are individual one-offs bought locally.

Tim Kensett, formerly of The River Café, is Head Chef and serves simple, unfussy dishes with a focus on clarity of flavour. The ever-changing highly seasonal menus utilise the abundance of exceptional Sussex produce.

At the heart of the hotel is a large 60 cover restaurant with a striking black and white stencilled Elizabethan design on the floor, painted by local artist Amanda Lawrence. The restaurant also has its own inner courtyard, created as a lovely spot for warm weather dining. This highlight of the hotel has a Mediterranean feel, with interesting climbing plants, lots of terracotta pots and unique trellises made by the local blacksmith. The china used in the restaurant has been designed and decorated in England by Gabriella Shaw, and features leaves from native English trees.





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The 15th century front of the hotel, known as The Inn, opens onto the High Street, and provides relaxed all day dining from 11am until 6pm, with local beers, open fires and oak beams. The library is a sanctuary for guests to enjoy a drink or a cup of tea, or play one of the board games. Its bookshelves are packed with poetry, short stories and novels by British authors, and there is a section dedicated to local history, flora and fauna. The library has a secret door that opens onto the restaurant.

Weddings, parties and small events will be held in the atmospheric Pilgrims' Room on the first floor of The Inn. It has oak beams, oriel windows overlooking the high street and can cater to 50 guests dining. The Star is available for two day exclusive use weddings, and has a licence to host civil ceremonies, making it the ideal venue for smaller weddings. Ceremonies are held in The Pilgrims' Room, and wedding breakfasts for up to 70 guests are hosted in The Dining Room.

There are eight sets of interconnecting rooms on the ground and first floors, ideal for families with children. Extra beds (for children up to age 12) are charged at £50 per night and there is no charge for a cot. The hotel provides high chairs, bottle warmers and emergency nappies. There is a children's menu available throughout the day until 6pm in The Inn and The Dining Room.

Well-behaved dogs are welcome in many of the rooms, at a charge of £25. We will offer dog blankets and dog bowls for our four-legged friends.

There is much to see and do in the area. Glyndebourne has long been a favourite for opera lovers, and the summer season never fails to impress. Take a walk around Charleston Farmhouse and its exceptional garden, the former home of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant and the hub of the Bloomsbury group. Charleston has an excellent calendar of art exhibitions as well as the lauded Charleston Festival in May that offers a star-studded line up of artists, writers and performers in conversation and performance.

Rathfinny wine estate is moments away from The Star, ideally located for those drawn to a winery tour, wine tasting, and delicious lunch with a glass of English sparkling, overlooking the vineyard.



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Walking and cycling around the Cuckmere Valley is a great way to take in the incredible surrounding landscape of the Seven Sisters and the South Downs. The hotel can recommend cycle hire, walking routes, and can even provide a rucksack picnic for guests to take on a day out. For those feeling a little more adventurous, there is paddle boarding and kayaking available on the Cuckmere River close to the hotel.

For families with young children, Drusillas Park is on the edge of Alfriston and is a must as it has a zoo, where children can even feed the penguins, and a popular theme park. Middle Farm with its play barn, farm shop and farm animals for the children to meet, also provides an excellent diversion for little ones.

We are trying hard to reduce our carbon footprint by minimising food waste, cutting down the amount we send to laundry, banning all single use plastics and encouraging our suppliers to do the same, adopting biodegradable cane sugar refillable bathroom products and using glass refillable water bottles throughout our operations. Website hosting is carbon neutral and electricity is from renewable sources.

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- Opened 2021
- 2 hours by car from London
- 1 hour 20 minutes by train
- 30 rooms and suites
- From £210 per night (B&B)
- Many rooms have terraces
- Dogs welcome
- 60 cover dining room
- 60 cover courtyard
- 60 cover inn
- Library
- Private dining room

# The Star

Olga Polizzi

Olga Polizzi is Deputy Chairman and Director of Design at Rocco Forte Hotels, a company she helped her brother Rocco Forte create; it owns well known, historic hotels worldwide including Brown's in London, the Hotel de Russie in Rome, the Astoria in St Petersburg and the Amigo in Brussels.

Olga is the owner of The Polizzi Collection, a group of three elegant hotels across the South of England; Hotel Endsleigh in Tavistock, Devon, Hotel Tresanton in St Mawes, Cornwall and The Star, Alfriston, East Sussex, her most recent acquisition with her daughter Alex.

Olga is chairman of the Trusthouse Charitable Foundation and is on the board of the Landau Forte Academy Trust, Chairman of the British Italian Society and the board of the Anglo Israel Association.

Olga is married to the author William Shawcross. She has two daughters, Alex, who is Channel 5's Hotel Inspector and Charlie, who owned and ran Onda in St Mawes for many years and now works as a women's wear buyer for a large fashion company. Her two step-children are Eleanor Wolfson and Conrad Shawcross.

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