

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 in 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 by 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 29 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 Star's new Forte Suite, is the largest in the hotel, and looks out over the pretty internal courtyard. There is a spacious bedroom with a kingsize bed, a bathroom with shower and bath, and the sitting room has comfortable seating, interesting artworks and an honesty bar. Both main rooms are decorated with Olga Polizzi's favourite leafy green wallpaper by Lewis and Wood, and her signature style is evident throughout with wonderful lighting, unusual objects, a relaxing mix of fabrics and plenty of books.

The Olga Suite has double aspect windows looking out over Star Lane, a large bathroom and light filled seating area, and is considered by many to be the finest room in the hotel.

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.

The kitchen serves simple, unfussy dishes with a focus on clarity of flavour. The everchanging 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. In June 2024, a new Walled Garden

was opened as another area for outdoor dining, with pleached laurels, large terracotta pots of lavender, camellias and oak leaved hydrangea. There is also a private area of The Walled Garden next to the cottage, screened by a pretty flint wall. This area is intended for private celebrations for up to twelve guests on a balmy summer's day.



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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. Another place to visit is Farleys House and Gallery, the fascinating former home of surrealist artist, Roland Penrose and the famed model and war photographer, Lee Miller.

The Towner Gallery in nearby Eastbourne has exceptional artworks on display, the highlight being the largest collection of works by Eric Ravilious (1903 – 1942).

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.

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- Opened 2021
- 2 hours by car from London
- 1 hour 20 minutes by train
- 29 rooms and suites
- From £240 per night (B&B)
- Many rooms have terraces
- Dogs welcome
- 60 cover dining room
- 60 cover courtyard
- 40 cover Walled Garden
- 12 cover Private Terrace
- 60 cover inn
- Library
- Private dining room

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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 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 and President of the British Italian Society.

Olga is married to the author Sir William Shawcross. She has two daughters, Alex, who is a hotelier and is Channel 5's Hotel Inspector and Charlie, who is a breathwork teacher. Her two step- children are Eleanor Wolfson and Conrad Shawcross.

@olgapolizzi

