

In landed English families, first-born boys win all and second sons get short shrift. But being No. 2 has not been so bad for Lord Edward Manners, even though upon the death of his father, the 10th duke of Rutland, six years ago, his elder brother, David, inherited the title and the lion's share of the family's vast holdings. David claimed the family's seat, Belvoir Castle, a Gothic palace in Leicestershire stocked with treasures by Poussin, Holbein and Gainsborough.

Edward, meanwhile, received Haddon Hall, a labyrinthine crenellated stone manor house in remote Derbyshire whose earliest portions date from the 1100s. "Of all our family properties, Haddon Hall was always considered the oldest and coldest and least comfortable," he says. "But it's the most romantic," he adds, breaking into a shy smile.

Indeed, Haddon Hall has been called the most romantic house in England, thanks not only to its story-book appearance but its colorful history. For 400 years, until the late 16th century, the property had belonged to the Vernons, a wealthy and powerful clan closely associated with Henry VIII. Sir George Vernon, known as King of the Peak (the area being known as the Peak District), had a child, Dorothy, who happened to fall in love with the young John Manners. As his descendant Edward recounts today, Vernon had major ambitions for his heir and "harshly disapproved" of the match. Though John was handsome and his father was an earl, he was a second son.

According to family lore, John disguised himself as a forester and had secret trysts with Dorothy in the woods. Finally, one night in 1563, the couple eloped while a boisterous banquet was taking place in the great hall. Dorothy ran down the 76 garden steps to find her waiting lover, who spirited her away on horseback over the moat.

Eventually, Vernon reconciled with his son-in-law. "He must have won him over, somehow," says Edward, pointing to the magnificent 110-foot-long, 17-foot-wide Long Gallery, which was built a decade or so later to celebrate the union of the two families, as evidenced by the emblems of the two clans carved in the elaborate oak paneling—the Vernon boar's head and the Manners peacock. More important, upon Vernon's death in 1567, Haddon Hall passed into the hands of the Mannenses, where it has been ever since.

"So it's always been a sort of establishment for second sons," explains Edward, a mild-mannered Eton graduate, on a glorious June afternoon. A leisurely lunch party is in progress, a kickoff celebration for two impending milestones: his 40th birthday and his wedding to Saskia Nixdorf, a 38-year-old willowy beauty who grew up in Germany and England. It is also the inauguration of his latest undertaking on the 3,750-acre estate, the restoration of Bowling



MANNERS BORN

Along with his new bride, Lord Edward Manners is breathing fresh life into Haddon Hall, one of England's oldest and most storied houses, owned by his family for 450 years. **By James Reginato**

Photographed by Simon Upton



Although Haddon Hall was begun in the 1100s, its lower courtyard, constructed out of local stone, dates from around 1450. **Opposite: Lord and Lady Manners.**



Green, a handsome, late-17th-century bowling green pavilion that he has converted into his private retreat for the summers, when tourists are allowed inside the state rooms of Haddon Hall.

Manners's dozen or so houseguests are wandering about the grounds of Bowling Green, as is his next-door neighbor, Deborah, the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire, the longtime chatelaine of palatial Chatsworth, which is just over the wall. A keen horticulturalist, she is carefully inspecting the new garden, which she pronounces, "Extraordinary!" A minimalist contemporary space designed by eminent landscape architect Arne Maynard, it features squares of herbaceous grasses with deep ruby-colored plantings and copper beech cubes.

Then it's time to scrutinize the interior, where Manners enlisted the help of hip Paris designer India Mahdavi. Combining finds from the family's extensive attics with pieces of her own design, Mahdavi has gracefully melded the 18th and 21st centuries. Being in the house-running business, the Duchess seems more interested in the details, however. Plumping a pillow in a bedroom, she marvels over its fluffiness then briskly yanks off the pillowcase to find the label so she can order some. "We need some of these soft pillows at Chatsworth," she tells a friend.

With Mahdavi's help, Manners also recently completed work on another house on the estate that he has turned into the Peacock, a delightful 16-room inn, which also includes a dining room recently named restaurant of the year in Derbyshire. During their stay, guests can avail themselves of the area's natural splendor, which includes some of the very best fly-fishing and pheasant shooting in England.

But for Manners, who also runs a media and IT business, Manners & Penn, in London, the first priority is maintaining Haddon Hall itself. Being a rambling 800-year-old house, it always

has something that needs fixing. Having drawn up a 30-year plan, he has a list of major projects he'll tackle as money permits, from replacing the lead roof to his current endeavor, the restoration of the windows in the chapel. "Hopefully when we finish they'll be good for another 600 years," he says. Keeping everything in good repair without diluting the house's unique air of antiquity is a challenge, however. Haddon Hall is widely considered England's best-preserved Medieval manor house. It owes its purity to the fact that the Mannesers closed it for 200 years. In 1703, when Queen Anne made the family dukes, they moved to their grander Belvoir (pronounced "Beaver") Castle. Thus, during the 18th and 19th centuries, when other such houses would have been rebuilt and redecorated, Haddon remained a kind of sleeping beauty.

During this period, the place became a celebrated romantic pilgrimage for certain aesthetically elevated individuals. After a peek inside, Henry James wrote that "of every form of sad desuetude and picturesque decay does Haddon Hall contain some delightful example."

It was just after World War I that Haddon's slumber ended, when the ninth duke of Rutland, Edward's grandfather, began a restoration. An amateur historian of great charm and sensitivity, he brought in craftsmen who used ancient techniques to restore it to more or less the way it was and introduced electricity and running water in nonintrusive ways.

Though he brought it back to life, the ninth duke kept Belvoir as his primary residence, letting his second son, Johnny, reside at Haddon. The duke's sister, the celebrated Diana Cooper, also paid visits. A society beauty who became an actress, she married Duff Cooper, England's ambassador to France. Today, Manners has dim but fond memories of his great-aunt. "I remember she had an extraordinary sense of humor," he says.

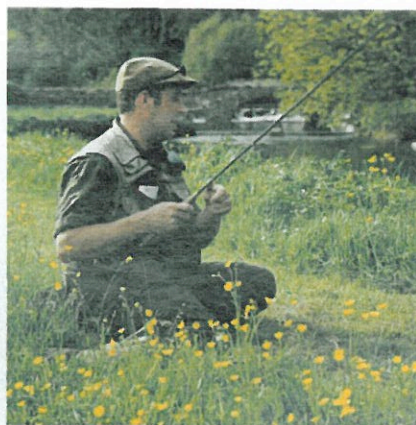


Left: The living room at Bowling Green, the Mannesers' private retreat. Contemporary pieces, such as the Jet Lag sofa by Parisian designer India Mahdavi, were combined with family antiques. **Above:** Saskia, Lady Manners. **Top left:** A young family friend enjoys a summer picnic.

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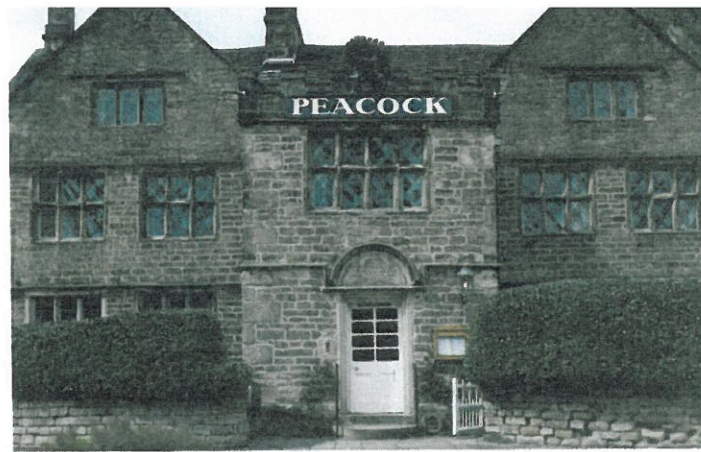
Right: Head river keeper Warren Slaney, casting his rod. Far right: Haddon Hall, built atop a limestone outcrop, overlooks the Derbyshire countryside. Above: A guest bedroom at Bowling Green.





Below: The oak-paneled Long Gallery. Right: A guest bedroom at Bowling Green. Far right: A detail of the master bedroom there, with a Full Moon desk designed by Mahdavi.





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Manners is somewhat less keen to reminisce about another relative, his maternal grandmother, Margaret, Duchess of Argyll, whose 1963 divorce—in which she was accused of flagrant adultery—was one of the most scandalous of the era. The duchess was later banned from Belvoir by Edward’s mother, a duchess herself. “Yes, she was controversial,” he acknowledges. “But I hardly knew her. I really didn’t,” he says, his voice trailing off.

Edward’s father, the 10th duke, was a beloved figure, well known for his ardent support of traditional English values. A Tory peer, he was the country’s longest-sitting duke at the time of his death, and also kept the longest-established pack of foxhounds. He enjoyed a healthy rivalry with his neighbor, the Duke of Devonshire, a Cambridge classmate who died earlier this year. Hints of that rivalry can be gleaned from the staff. After I return from a visit to Chatsworth the next day, Mrs. Whittaker, the indefatigable head housekeeper for decades, chides me: “Been over to the opposition, have we?” Though she is clearly speaking in jest, she releases a slight jab. “They only have snakes over there,” she says, referring to the Devonshire emblem as she proudly flashes a jeweled brooch in the shape of a peacock.

Strolling through the house today, one can almost see the hands of time. Huge stone steps are now concave, worn down by generations of boots. Yet, as Manners delights in explaining, life here was once surprisingly innovative. The top of the massive long table that dates from the early 1400s in the Banqueting Hall was cleverly reversible. After a messy feast, servants (lots of them, no doubt) would flip it over and it was ready for the next meal. In 1632 the first fork made in England was used here, a silver two-pronged item that the family recently donated to the Victoria & Albert Museum.

As it would have been at the time, the house is largely spare, to the point of being almost empty in parts. Yet, as Manners observes, “It’s always been very lively.” Indeed, in their day, his ancestors were

major entertainers, as can be seen in the ancient kitchen, a series of capacious rooms still with their original but much hacked-upon chopping blocks. When feasts were being prepared, Manners points out, fires would have been blasting in the domed ovens, so the male servants (no women here) scurried about in loincloths.

This past July, fever-pitch entertaining returned to Haddon, when Edward and his new bride threw a rousing white-tie ball in the Long Gallery. Candlelight perfectly illuminated the room’s elaborately carved, silvery-gray oak paneling and diamond-paned windows (still with their original glass), and deejays kept guests gyrating to hip hop and house music until 7 a.m. Edward confesses he fretted at first about what damage might befall the massive but still pristine floorboards, but soon relaxed. “It was a really good scene,” he says. “It was fantastic to see the place filled and used.”

“The house has a great vibe and really comes alive when people are in it,” agrees the new Lady Manners. Formerly married to German computer heir Martin Nixdorf, she doesn’t look nearly old enough to have her two lovely daughters, 16 and 17. (“I got an early start,” she says, laughing.)

Though she now says Haddon “couldn’t be more friendly,” she confesses that she was daunted upon her first visits. “I did find it rather forbidding,” she recalls. But it was easy to warm to, with her fiancé’s enthusiasm for the place. “Edward is so the right person to carry through what his grandfather started. He has the same passion for it,” she says.

While some people might see taking over a large and old estate as a burden, Manners calls it “a wonderful lifetime project.” “It’s amazing to have this length of history behind you and see yourself in a continuum—to be conscious of what you will leave behind and how you will make that link to the future,” he says.

“And in the meantime, it’s about enjoying it,” he adds, before rejoining his lunch party. ●

Below, from left: The new garden at Bowling Green, designed by Arne Maynard; the Banqueting Hall. Top: The Peacock, the newly opened inn and restaurant on the estate; haddonhall.co.uk

