

The manor, reborn

A London-born former Hongkonger tells *Peta Tomlinson* about moving back into her family's 15th century estate in southwest England

In 2018, after 15 years in Hong Kong, Briton Alice Fortescue heard her ancestral roots calling when a perfect storm drew her, her husband, Robert Derry, and their two Hong Kong-born children back to the family estate, Ebrington Manor.

"The idea had always been to build a business [in Hong Kong] and sell it," says Fortescue, who inherited the honorific "Lady" from her father, Charles Fortescue, 8th Earl Fortescue.

In fact, the couple, who moved to Hong Kong in 2003, had built two successful businesses in the events sector, selling both to the same buyer who offered Derry a job in Britain, where Fortescue could also continue her work in the rugby sevens-related events she'd started in Hong Kong.

"Rob's father was not well," says Fortescue. "My father was getting on as well, and he asked if we'd be interested in taking on the house."

Her parents, living in the main house at the time, would downsize into the (now renovated) old farm buildings on the estate.

Having grown up in Ebrington since the age of three months, London-born Fortescue knew every inch of the three-storey Cotswold manor set on 80 hectares (of the original 800) near Chipping Campden, in Gloucestershire, southwest Britain, complete with summer house, lake house, ponds, orchards and rose gardens.

"Maintaining a house like this is hugely expensive," says Fortescue. "We always knew we'd have to incorporate some sort of commercial venture to make it work."

However, getting the place ready to host family groups, weddings and corporate and private events while also functioning as a family home required an extensive renovation. As a grade two-listed building certain parameters had to be observed. More important was the preservation of 500 years of family heritage.

The house was just 50 years young when Sir John Fortescue, chancellor to Henry VI, bought Ebrington Manor Estate from the Corbett family in 1456. According to Fortescue, the only time it hasn't been in family hands was when King Edward confiscated the property "for

Left:
Ebrington Manor
has been in the
Fortescue family
for most of its
long history

Right:
the 80-hectare
grounds include
a lake fed by a
natural spring,
a boathouse,
rose gardens
and an orchard



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