



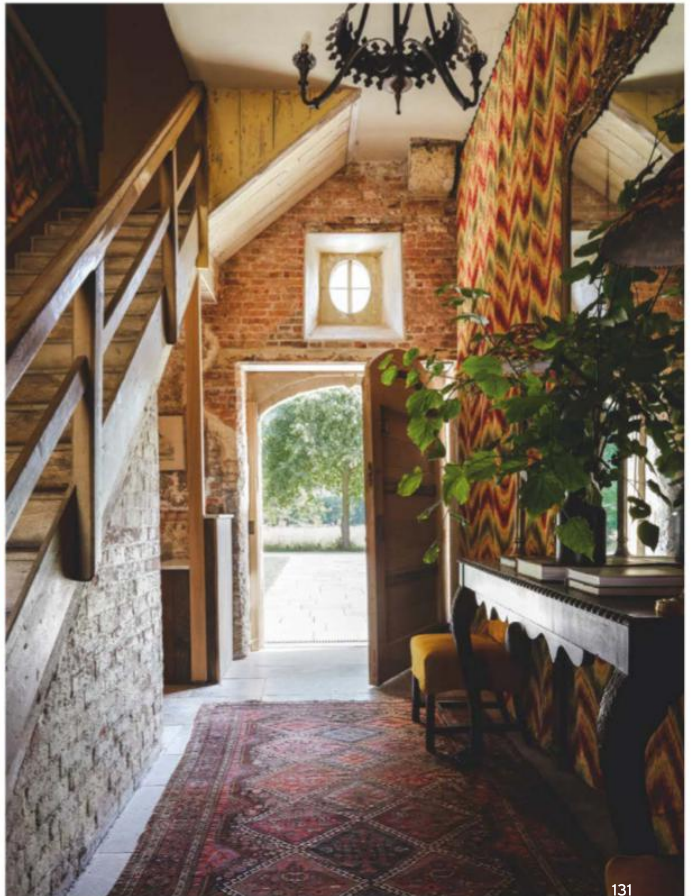
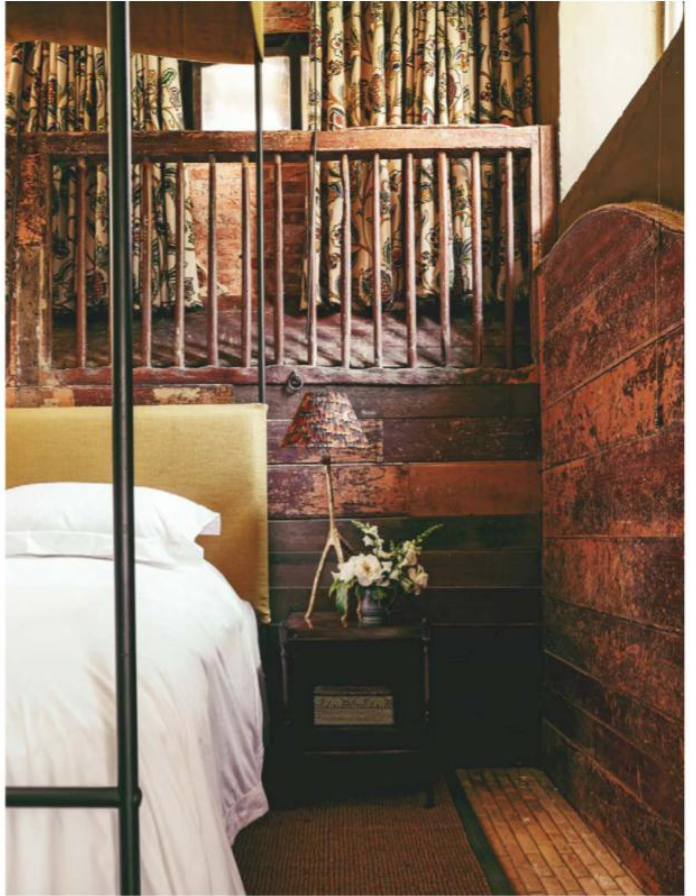
BEST FOR ECCENTRIC CHARACTER

THE RIDING HOUSE, DORSET

There is a faint smell of a tack room in the comfortable sitting room of the Riding House. The leathery scent comes from a far wall, where there are rows of shiny saddles on sturdy beams, a reminder that this is indeed a 17th-century stable block. The building is the latest piece of a massive restoration on Dorset's Shaftesbury estate. Nick Ashley-Cooper became the 12th Earl of Shaftesbury in 2005, when his older brother died of a heart attack at just 27. Ashley-Cooper had been a successful DJ and music promoter in New York before moving back to the crumbling ancestral seat. In 2010, he and his wife Dinah Streifeneder, a vet, began turning the main house, St Giles, into a home as colourful as its past. Now, the next-door stables have been converted into an eight-bedroom guesthouse. It is a place of new and old, where the brick floors, intentionally rough paintwork and frayed-wood partitions remind you that you're sleeping in ancient stalls. Theatricality runs through it all, with Pierre Frey velvet used as wallpaper hung on wrought-iron poles, and a giant, bronze horse head in the entrance hall. Other touches are faintly spooky, such as the mantrap hanging beside the bar, or the leg emerging from a wall in one room. 'We didn't want it to be safe,' says Ashley-Cooper of the project. 'We wanted it to be bold, brave, an experience.'

Stays on a country estate have never felt so thrilling.
SALLY SHALAM +44 1725 517 214; stgileshouse.com.

From £1,800 per night (sleeps 18)



PHOTOGRAPHS: JUSTIN BARTON; PAUL MASSEY