

COTSWOLDS CONFIDENTIAL

The secret address that puts happy into healthy – a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed Emma Freud spills the beans

Photographed by Amelia Troubridge

Just so you know, I'm really not a spa-fitness-retreat kind of a girl. I love a treatment and am first in line for a bit of PE, but when it's a great big, organised, timetabled, group thing, it just doesn't work for me. I get too competitive during the exercise; I get grumpy during bad treatments. I'm always taking off my bathrobe at the wrong moment, and I don't do communal changing rooms. The whole set-up makes me tense.

So, when I was invited to spend three days experiencing the Temple Guiting programme, I asked to take four friends with me so I could guarantee some normal bodies, and solidarity. 'Can we bring alcohol?' one of them queried. 'I told you, it's a detox,' I replied (they are nice, my friends, but they find it hard to concentrate).

The whole thing was a revelation. Here's how it works: Temple Guiting is one of the prettiest manor houses in one of the prettiest villages in the Cotswolds. It's *Midsomer Murders* meets *Cranford*. The manor house is staggering enough, but in its five-bedroom stable block, designer Sophie Conran (also very pretty, plus very clever, and great clothes) has created one of the most beautiful courtyards you've ever seen. Picture three sides of an ancient converted barn, wrapped around a lavender-laden stone terrace with a hot tub, a gorgeous lunch table and water garden with views of paddocks, orchards, copses and thickets (though Lord knows what they are).

And in this haven of classy, contemporary loveliness, aspirational bed linen and scented candles, the house manager Caroline has fashioned an idyll where you can create the bespoke spa retreat of your dreams – or, if you have a masochistic streak, your nightmares. If you want to do six hours of daily boot-camp training, eat only raw linseed, drink organic flower water and spend evenings on a bed of nails, Caroline will make it happen. Or, if you fancy a few days of facials/massages, followed by wine tastings (without the spitting out) and cookery lessons from the likes of Antonio Carluccio, finished off with dance sessions led by an attractive, ripped male salsa teacher, Caroline will make it happen. I love Caroline – she is the calmest, most organised person I have ever met, and I want to be her when I grow up.

What she created for us was the perfect compromise – three days where we had something that should probably be called 'boot camp'. In the 50 hours we were in residence, we each had a massage from a goddess called Laura, in a scenic shepherd's hut in the middle of an orchard, accompanied by birdsong. We had an uplifting pilates class in the beautiful double-height sitting room of the stables with an instructor called Nicky, who actually praised us when we 'rolled like a ball', instead of laughing. We did two hours of Nordic walking, taking to the Gloucestershire hills with a dedicated chap called Ed, who taught us how to stride with sticks in the manner of a hearty Norwegian hiker. 'I look ridiculous,' said my friend Joanna. 'You do,' we agreed. 'You don't,' lied Ed. When we had finished, he told us that we had Nordic-walked-off 580 calories. 'Does that mean we can each drink an entire bottle of Sancerre to celebrate?' asked Joanna. 'It only has 510 calories, so we would still be in credit?'

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We had tennis lessons on the stunning grass court, flanked by chocolate-box dry-stone walls, with views to the Brecon Beacons. And the highlight: 90 minutes of full-on boot-camp workout, but with two of the most attractive instructors seen outside of a top London model agency. We tried our best to turn it into 'kitten heel camp', but they were having none of it. It was as delightful as an hour and a half of physical torture can be.

Between sessions we lay in the cedar hot tub, where the water was the colour of tea and smelt so beautifully of cedar that no moth will ever come near me again. We delighted in this heavenly place as though we owned it – and at night we had it entirely to ourselves, to hold a healthy(ish), top-class house party. Had we smuggled through alcohol in our car boots, we could have snaffed it in at night, as we were unguarded and delightfully independent. (But of course we wouldn't do such a thing.)

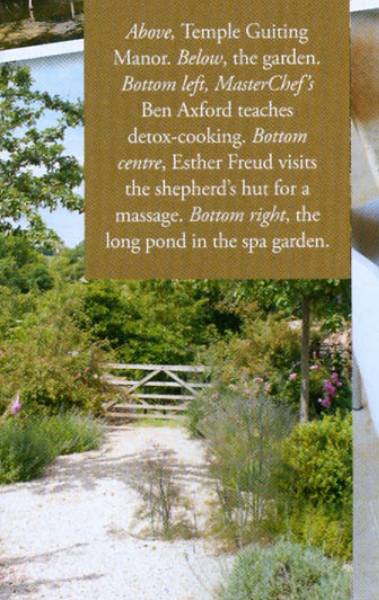
And the rest of the time we ate, almost continuously. But here's the thing – it was some of the best food I've tasted, and there was no dairy, wheat, sugar or carb in any of it. Caroline had brought in a detox chef, with the temptingly non-detox name of Rachel Cappuccini. Breakfast was homemade, wheat-free, seed-heavy muesli with soya yoghurt and pomegranate seeds, and egg-white omelettes filled with parsley. Lunch was seared salmon with beetroot hummus (one of the most delicious things I have ever put in my mouth, and there's strong competition) and a flower salad with hemp seeds and lavender, followed by pineapple encrusted with tiny jewels of chopped chilli (do you see I went a bit Nigella there?). Supper was chicken poached in elderflower with goat's cheese and fig, key lime pie made with agave syrup instead of sugar, and puréed avocado instead of cream. I know, but trust me, it was actually lovely. And at every feast, we had detox juices that sounded revolting (spinach, lemon, celery and hair shirt?) but tasted like health in a glass, in a seriously good way.

Our treat for being such excellent guests was an evening with Ben Axford – runner-up in last year's *MasterChef* – who came in to show us some high-class healthy cooking and then let us eat it. He's properly handsome and managed to cope with five slightly hormonal women in their 40s (I'm being generous here, by the way) being way too gushy about his divine beetroot carpaccio and the crab/corn combo. I think he must have liked us because he palmed us a very non-detox prosecco jelly as he left.

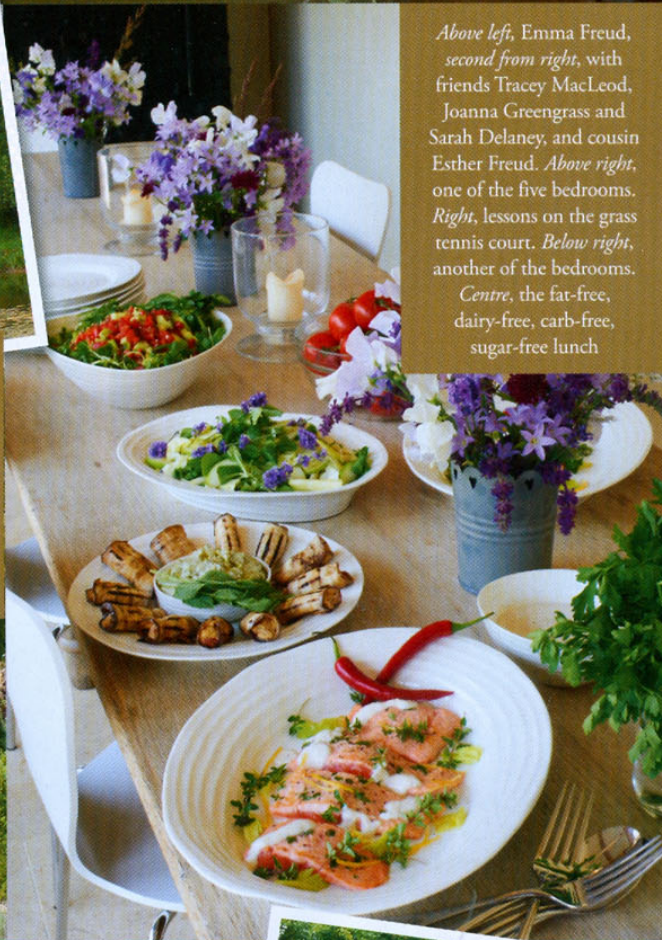
So that's it, I'm a convert. Not to those regimes in a spa or health farm where you're taught to wind up, wind down, chew things a lot and emerge officially 'transformed'. I distrust anyone who 'transforms'. No, I'm a convert to three days of total joy, pretending I actually live in the most gorgeous barn conversion in Britain, being instructed by incredibly generous professionals, where I am in charge of the brief, but not of the schedule, and where my self-styled detox regime can include eating alcoholic jelly. It would appear my body is a Temple Guiting. □

Book it Contact Sophie Conran for Temple Guiting (sophieconran@templeguiting.com or ring 020 7706 1309)





Above, Temple Guiting Manor. Below, the garden. Bottom left, MasterChef's Ben Axford teaches detox-cooking. Bottom centre, Esther Freud visits the shepherd's hut for a massage. Bottom right, the long pond in the spa garden.



Above left, Emma Freud, second from right, with friends Tracy MacLeod, Joanna Greengrass and Sarah Delaney, and cousin Esther Freud. Above right, one of the five bedrooms. Right, lessons on the grass tennis court. Below right, another of the bedrooms. Centre, the fat-free, dairy-free, carb-free, sugar-free lunch

