

# Cottonmill Spa is a Hertfordshire haven – and only minutes from King's Cross

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CHARLOTTE JOHNSTONE

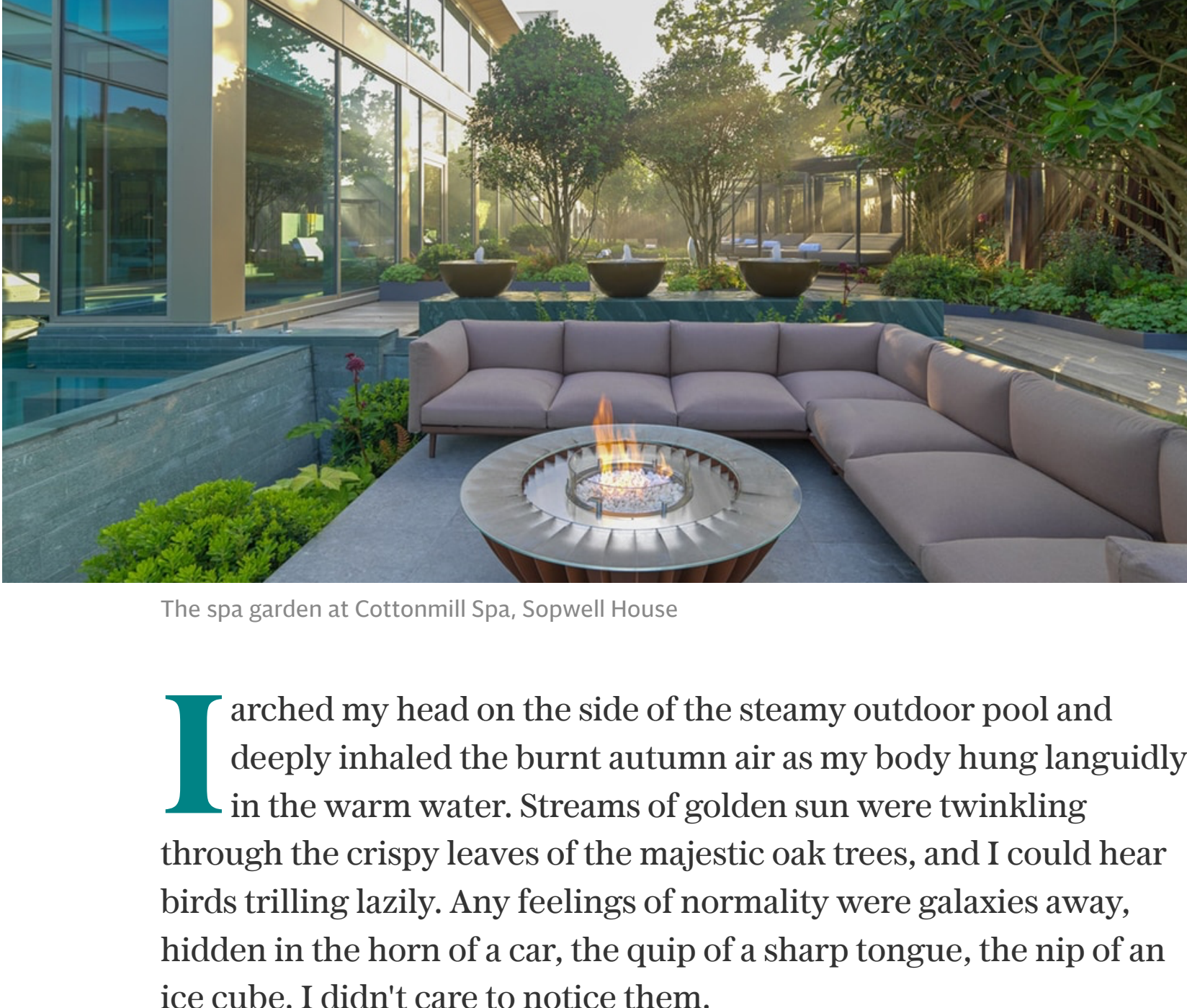
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The spa garden at Cottonmill Spa, Sopwell House

I arched my head on the side of the steamy outdoor pool and deeply inhaled the burnt autumn air as my body hung languidly in the warm water. Streams of golden sun were twinkling through the crispy leaves of the majestic oak trees, and I could hear birds trilling lazily. Any feelings of normality were galaxies away, hidden in the horn of a car, the quip of a sharp tongue, the nip of an ice cube. I didn't care to notice them.

And with a loud splash my friend arrived. She tiptoed clumsily through the water and flopped next me. "Can't believe we're only 10 minutes from the M25," she said, eyes closed. "I feel like I'm in the shires of middle England". Almost exactly a year ago now, we had escaped central London for the weekend and travelled less than an hour by car to [Sopwell House](#), a four-star Georgian hotel near St Albans. Though I could just about make out the low purr of passing cars we really did feel like we were in the middle of nowhere, in a spa of Instagram dreams.

The Sitting Room waiting area immediately set the tone, with a crowd-pleasing palette of geometric styling, herringbone-patterned flooring, lots of woods and contravertic industrial accents. It's here that you're handed electronic wristbands and 'sleeping bags' for your phones as you discuss your personal spa day itinerary (a subtle way of saying, in my opinion, that you're allowed your phone but be discreet, though they will tell you it's so you can have a screen break).



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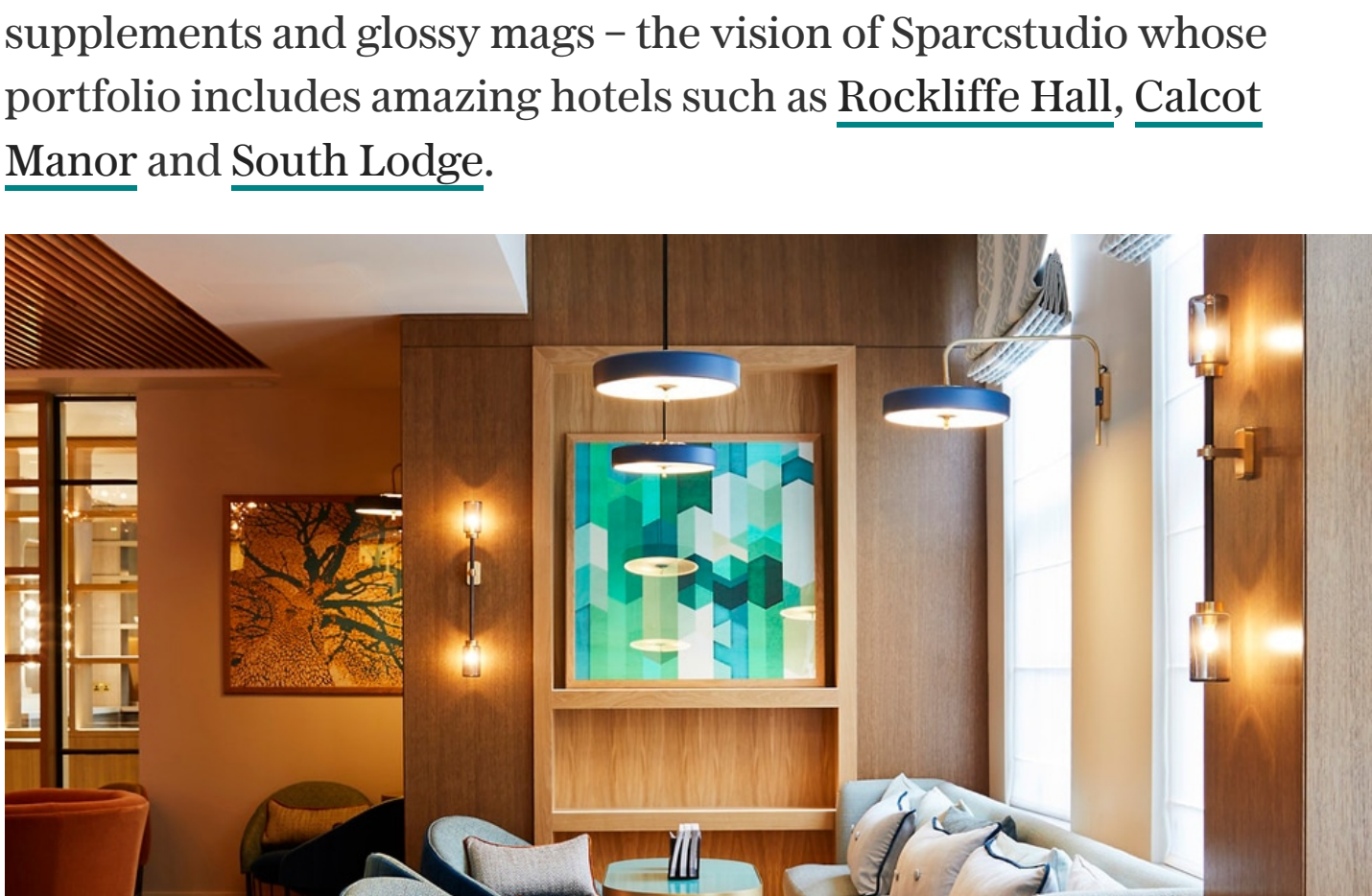
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Elsewhere, the £14m creative, modern design prevails in facilities like thermal suites and outdoor day beds – Garden-of-Eden-esque images of which I'd seen righteously splashed across spa supplements and glossy mags – the vision of Sparcstudio whose portfolio includes amazing hotels such as [Rockcliffe Hall](#), [Calcot Manor](#) and [South Lodge](#).



The Sitting Room at Cottonmill Spa - a feat of glorious design

There are two tiers of exclusivity: *Cottonmill* and *The Club at Cottonmill*, due to the fact that this is a members' spa – one of the first on the UK hotel scene – and so not not all areas are free to roam. The indoor swimming pool, two vitality pools plus gym are all open to members, hotel and day guests, as is the post-treatment Rose Relaxation Room. The Club at Cottonmill is open to 'select' members and a limited number of guests on Club packages. And, though I feel guilty about this unusual slice of elitism, I can't get my robe on fast enough as I prance towards the Whisper Room.

It's totally worth it. We have the space – a light-filled heaven of squishy day beds and unnecessary cubist fireplace blocks – almost all to ourselves and I can see right over the spa garden (part of the Club, designed by Ann-Marie Powell who has won gold medals at RHS Chelsea Flower Show) with its three al fresco hot tubs, an outdoor moon or 'weather' shower and indoor-outdoor infinity thermal pool, sofas encircling firepits and cabanas set along pond-like water features inspired by the River Ver.

I explore the amenities and find two saunas, one organic, another with panoramic views; two steam rooms, one briny, the other herby; experience showers that mimic a tropical storm; and what is called a Deep Relaxation Room. This completely dark room, save for the spacepod-like Four Senses loungers, which light up, play music and vibrate, is where I found my Zen before heading to the Garden room and swimming out into the golden rays.

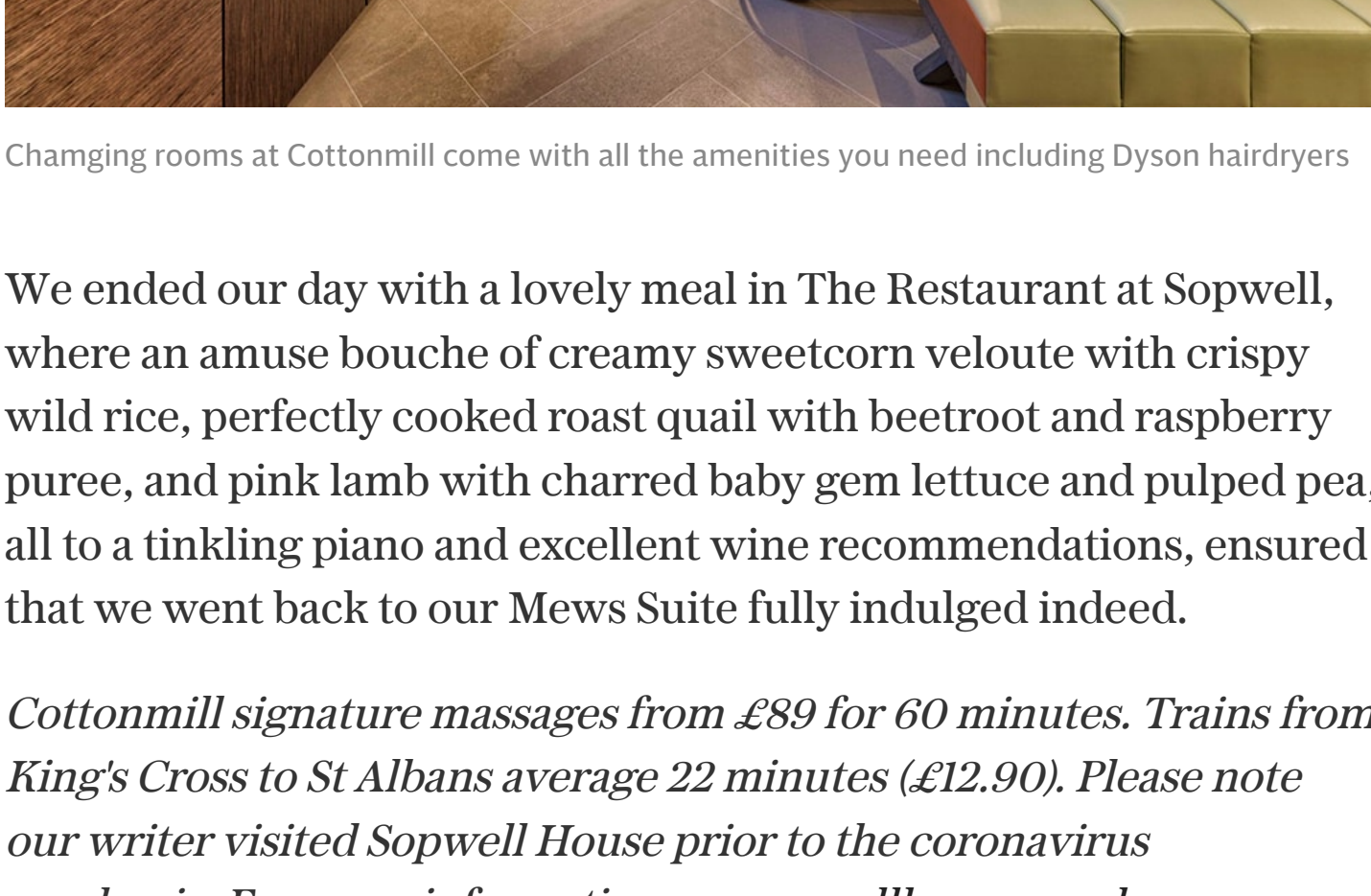


View from the whisper room at Cottonmill Spa

And the treatments? The therapists use Elemis and Aromatherapy Associates products, alongside traditional therapies like Shiatsu and reflexology. Mine told me that the team were tasked with creating their own signature treatments inspired by the spa's surroundings and so I opted for the 60-minute Sand & Water ritual. Unfortunately this particular treatment on hold due to health and safety guidelines, but all other massages (using similar techniques and principles) under 60 minutes are still on the menu.

To give an idea of the TLC one might expect, my ritual involved a large, clunky bed that resembled a small snooker table covered with warm sand (plus a nice silky sheet) that gently vibrated throughout the treatment. The bed also tilted slightly – though it felt like a lot at the time – and there were singing bowls. A muscle-melting massage followed. Afterwards, my therapist told me to take it easy for rest of day, let the oils sink in, drink lots of water and stay away from any vigorous exercise for a good 24 hours. Okay!

There are a few dining options if you're visiting the spa. The Sitting Room has a grab-and-go bar; the Pantry is where you can pick up delicious soups, salads and chef specials like lamb chops, salmon and pasta (I had an incredible silky mushroom and tarragon ravioli); and the slightly more formal Brasserie. One can tuck into their lunch wearing one's robe in the former two, not the latter.



Changing rooms at Cottonmill come with all the amenities you need including Dyson hairdryers

We ended our day with a lovely meal in The Restaurant at Sopwell, where an amuse bouche of creamy sweetcorn veloute with crispy wild rice, perfectly cooked roast quail with beetroot and raspberry puree, and pink lamb with charred baby gem lettuce and pulped pea, all to a tinkling piano and excellent wine recommendations, ensured that we went back to our Mews Suite fully indulged indeed.

*Cottonmill signature massages from £89 for 60 minutes. Trains from King's Cross to St Albans average 22 minutes (£12.90). Please note our writer visited Sopwell House prior to the coronavirus pandemic. For more information see [sopwellhouse.co.uk](#)*

Read the full review: [Sopwell House, Hertfordshire](#)

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