

# Grand British houses for a truly restorative retreat

Palatial pads — four private British homes to take over, from historic halls to forest retreats

## Verte, Chevithorne, Devon

In the age of ease and smart screens, of the joys of WFH and Deliveroo, it's hard not to be slightly sceptical of reports that increased exposure to nature leads to a rise in wellbeing — both physical and mental. Is spending more time looking at leaves instead of at your iPhone really going to improve your cognitive flexibility? Is a weekend in a hillside house actually going to make you happier than one in a city hotel? Well, if the house in question happens to be Verte, the Riba award-winning treehouse in Devon, then the answer is a resounding yes. Set on the privately owned Chevithorne Barton estate, home to the UK's largest collection of oaks, it is a unique, ultra-modern treehouse built by David Sheppard Architects. Thanks to the designers' clever use of glass and larch cladding, the structure slips seamlessly into its green surroundings. The estate's long association with trees is also reflected inside: from the pleasingly precise birch plywood shelving to the warm oak floors, Verte is a celebration of wood and the undoubted showpieces are the bespoke staircase and dining table, both carved from a beech felled by a storm. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame views of the forest and the central, open-plan living space naturally becomes the heart of the house. With its ample built-in seating and modern circular fireplace, you can't help but relax here and feel the calming influence of being high among the treetops. Although beautifully designed, this four-bedroom house is also a family home that has been created for entertaining and living, rather than just admiring. There are meadows outside, a wood-fired hot tub, tree swings and two rowing lakes. It's only from here, when you look back at the house, that you can fully appreciate its scale and impressive height. Those not tempted to venture into the nearby Exmoor National Park or Blackdown Hills can book private chefs and at-home spa therapists through Unique Homestays, which has a portfolio of more than 180 can't-find-elsewhere luxury private rental homes across Britain and Ireland. Owned by the aptly named Green family, Verte is a place full of beauty, serenity and comfort, which gives you a feeling of renewal and optimism. Maybe there is something in spending time looking at those leaves after all ... **Lee Belcher**

*Three nights for six adults and four children from £2,595, [uniquehomestays.com](https://www.uniquehomestays.com)*

