

TRAVEL

How interior designers are shaping the new breed of pubs

The idea of the old smoke-filled, horse-brass-bedecked pub interior still has a strong pull for many of us, but these days punters are demanding a bit more sophistication from their pubs. Serena Fokschaner explores how interior designers are ushering the new ultra-chic pub into existence

By Serena Fokschaner

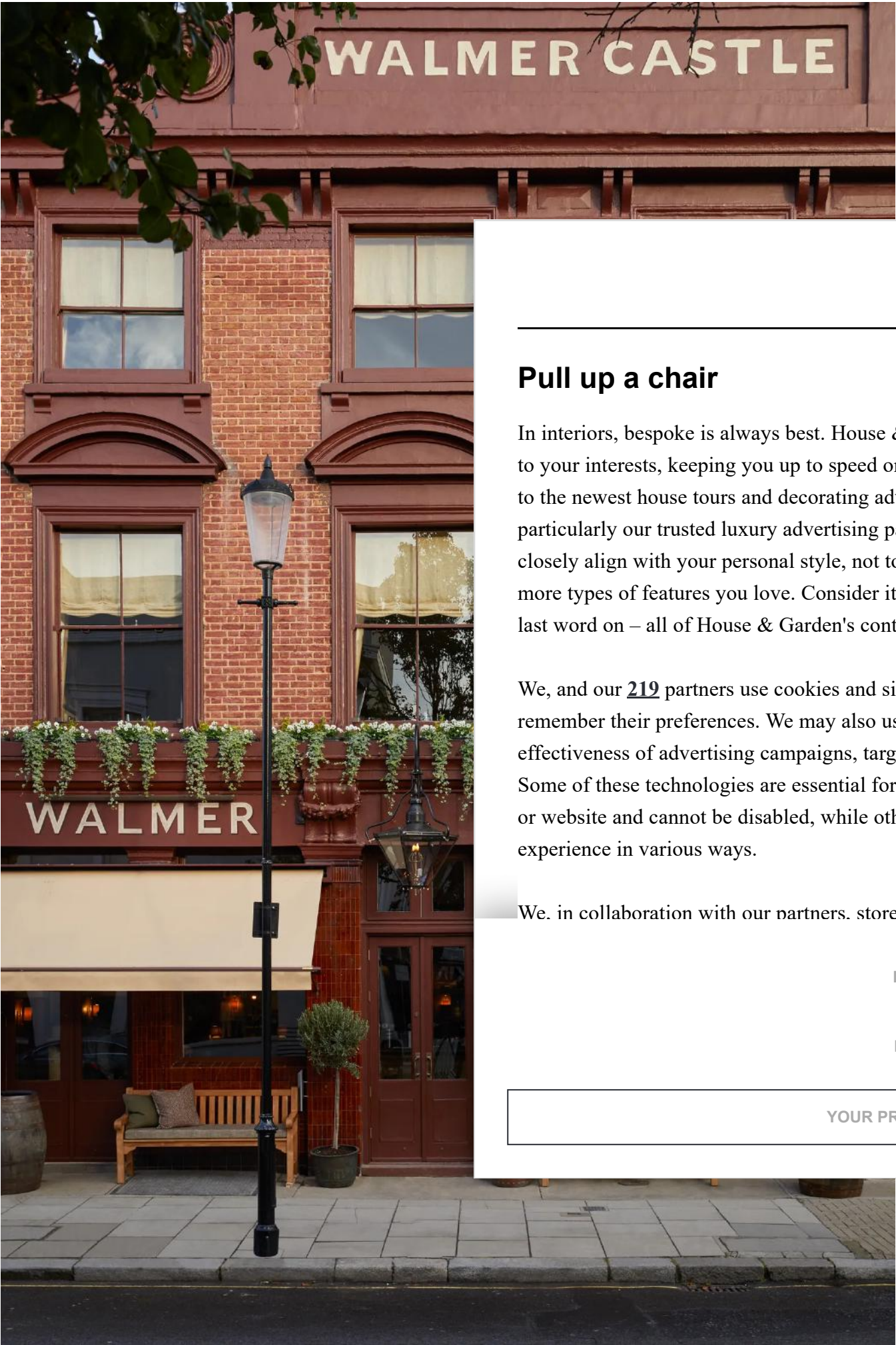
11 July 2025



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The Walmer Castle, Notting Hill Helen Cathcart

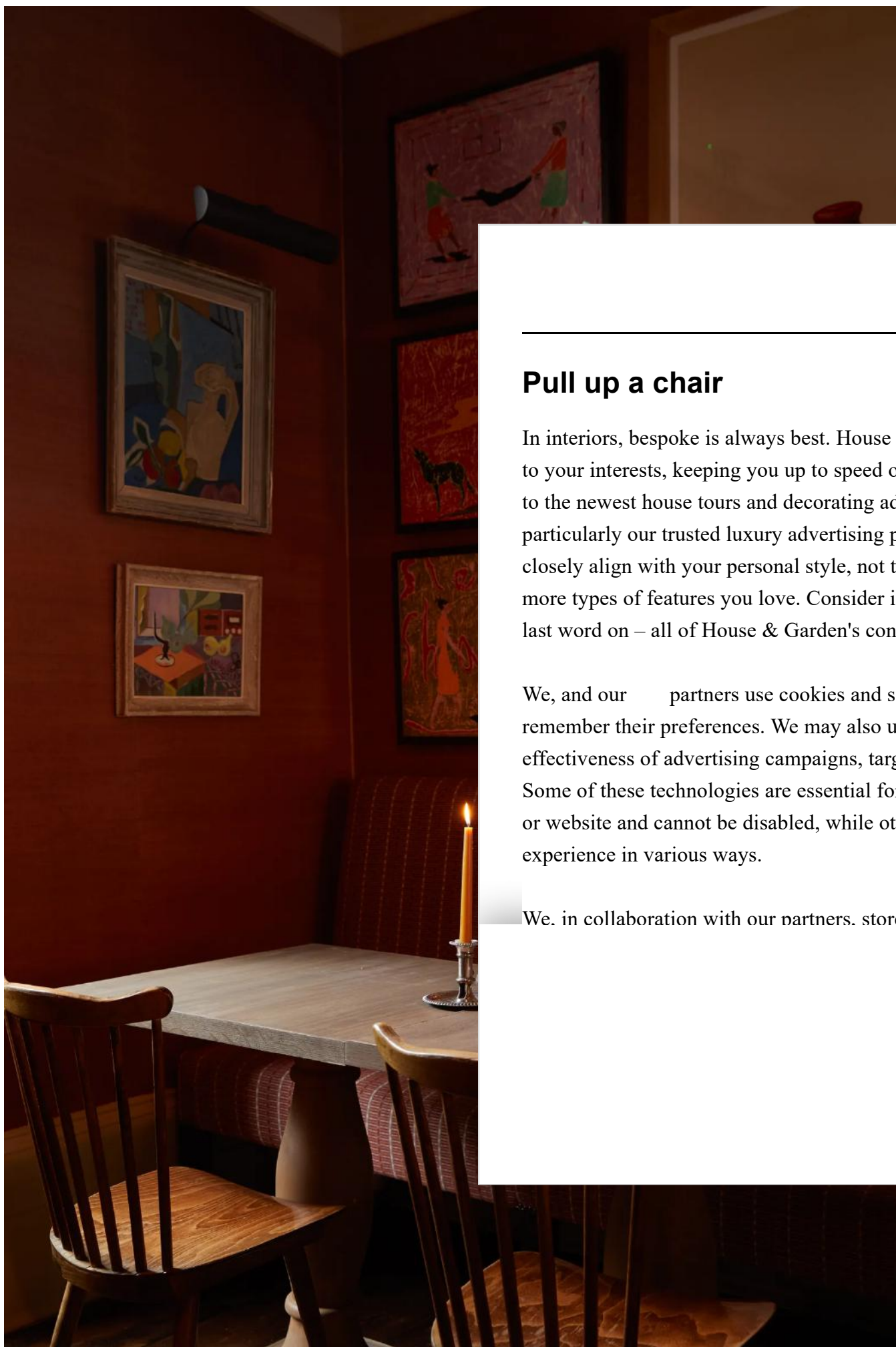
The affection for the great British pub runs deep in our national psyche. But, like any institution it has to adapt to change. This is why, in recent years, more enlightened publicans and estate owners have begun enlisting interior designers to reboot the fortunes of loved but lacklustre locals. Octavia Dickinson, James Thurstan and Isabella Worsley are among those who have turned their hand to public houses, bringing their colourful, eclectic, art and antiques-centric aesthetic to pubs both rural and urban.

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The Walmer Castle, Notting Hill Helen Cathcart

We have been congregating in watering holes since the Romans brought the *taberna* to Britain. The conventional pub interior of oak-topped countertops and glittering glass-lined bars dates back to the Victorian period. And there will always be room for a traditional interior: fireplaces and atmospheric snugs, redolent of pipe-smoke fugs past. A bit worn. Reassuringly used. ‘People want that sense of nostalgia. A sense of timelessness – and escapism,’ says Isabella Worsley, who has worked on several pubs, including The Walmer Castle in Notting Hill and The Surprise in Chelsea, both owned by the independent, family-run *pubs*. expecting more sophistication from our pubs.



The Surprise, Chelsea Helen Cathcart

‘I love an old boozer,’ says architect Lou Davies, co-founder of architecture studio BOX 9 Design. ‘It used to be a place for women, families – all ages, and all genders. Now, people have equally grown tired of the ‘formulaic design of pub chains, especially those in cities. ‘A more individual, characterful space,’ says Jack Greenall, co-founder of Wren Pubs. ‘Consumers can see through it. It doesn’t have the ring of authenticity.’ Now, he says, the focus is on ‘the building, its history, and location. The design has to feel unique, special - and local.’

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