



Frogg Manor Hotel ~ & Restaurant

A further independent "American" view

Another night spent in the bar at our favourite hotel, Frogg Manor. Set in nine acres of pretty gardens and undulating fields in the Cheshire countryside, Frogg Manor has the unique distinction of being the only hotel regularly patronised by myself and the Deputy Prime Minister. Can't speak for John Prescott, but Niki and I always take the beautiful Wellington Room, the central and largest suite, with its beautiful appointments, extra room for Lili, and secret passageway to the bar.

Niki's asleep, but my mind is on Californian time tonight; I'm in the bar, preparing myself for sleep with whiskey. Springbank Campbeltown, twenty-one years old, probably my favourite dram. All alone, too. No-one booked into Frogg Manor's exquisite restaurant tonight (these quiet nights happen, even in a four-star establishment -- we're well off the beaten track, here), so when we returned from a day and meal out, proprietor John Sykes (who is also known as Chief Frog. Yes.) took advantage of the lull to escape for the night. But he's left the bar open just for me. So here I am, flicking through his vast and eclectic collection of books (Schelesinger's memoir of Robert Kennedy next to the collected leatherbound Victor Hugo next to a four-volume history of Denmark next to James Kelman and a huge book of Earth photographs taken from the Space Shuttle), sipping fine Scotch, wandering behind his bar to refill with a cigar in my teeth, pausing only to write down everything I take in a progressively sloppier and more spidery hand so that my bill can be made exact. Honest to the penny. This is, after all, Frogg Manor. I want to be able to come back.

We did think of you all; reclining in our serene decadence here at temperate, silent, empty and beautiful Frogg Manor while the rest of my chosen industry sweated their tits off and ran their feet into bleeding nubs at San Diego. A friendless pit 44,000 people deep. An email received here at Frogg Manor from there at SDCC raised a laugh at the Wellington suite one golden morning; an email to the effect that the general consensus reached among my friends, colleagues and other bastards there was that I was the smart one for not going. I read this, recounted it to my family, joined in the ruthless laughter, and then drained my freshly squeezed orange juice and took them down to breakfast in the conservatory, to watch the wild rabbits play in the morning sun.

Being a writer is not about conventions, not really; not about handshakes and signatures and business cards. Not really. The secret to our game is simple and stupid; writing is about living. Just living. And, as I'm sure you've heard, living well is the best revenge.