

TOWN & COUNTRY

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THE PURSUIT

Sign Up for Real Life *Downton Abbey* Cosplay

Move over, cowboy. The classic British hunt takes over the American West.

BY CAROLINE REILLY

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALLIE HOLLOWAY

STYLED BY DANIA LUCERO ORTIZ



WORTH & WORTH BY ORLANDO PALACIOS CAP (\$145), HATSHOP.COM. HERMES SCARF (\$620), HERMES.COM. BURBERRY GLOVES (\$980), US.BURBERRY.COM. SIR JACK'S DUCK HEAD BOTTLE OPENER (\$998), SIRJACKS.COM. ORVIS EDITION PRO FARS GOLD II 26 EARMUFFS (\$200), ORVIS.COM. IL BISONTE BAG (\$495), ILBISONTE.COM. 100HANDS X OLD STONE TRADE FLANNEL TOP (\$470), OLDSTONETRADE.COM. LORO PIANA BOOTS (\$3,530), LOROPIANA.COM. CROOTS HELMSLEY SHOTGUN SLIP (\$515), BERETTAGALLERYUSA.COM. BLAZE MILANO BLAZER (\$1,900), BLAZE-MILANO.COM.

What to get the discerning Anglophile? How about a trip to Idaho to visit Blixt & Co., a British-inspired hunting club bringing the classic shooting party to the American West.



It's a sport beloved by kings and queens, one with centuries of tradition for which participants wear custom-made tweeds and tromp across acres of meticulously tended land. Enthusiasts from around the globe will mention one destination where they want to raise their shotguns and take aim—and it's in Idaho.

For shooting savants and Anglophiles alike, Blixt & Co., in the Gem State's Teton Valley, is the ultimate destination not only for traditional driven pheasant and partridge shooting but also for living out one's *Downton Abbey* fantasies without leaving the U.S.

It began in 2009, when Lars Magnusson leased 2,000 acres in Idaho to offer an authentic shooting experience in the American West. Magnusson was raised about an hour south of Gothenburg, Sweden, where he learned to hunt and shoot from his father. When it was

time for him to take the customary gap year before college, he opted to work as an instructor at a private shooting school. Then came a call from London: Magnusson was offered a position as an instructor at the oldest shooting academy in the UK, the West London Shooting School.

"It was very different in the United Kingdom," Magnusson says. Back home the hunting culture involved syndicates of locals leasing a parcel of land and meeting up on weekends. "In the UK it was much more like *The Crown*: The aristocracy invited their friends to their estates."

From London, Magnusson's acumen for the sport brought him across the pond. He was asked by British gunmaker James Purdey & Sons to assist some American clients. "The gun fit was hosted at Hudson Farm [the New Jersey home ground of the outfitter Griffin &

Howe]," he says, "and I ended up getting a job offer to run their shooting school."

From there he decided to undertake a project all his own: to bring the kind of driven shooting enjoyed in the English countryside to the American West. That's when he met Jennifer Hotz, a graphic designer who owned an ad agency in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Hotz had been tasked with creating a marketing package for a group of investors looking to build a shooting-focused real estate development, and Magnusson was brought in to develop the shooting program. Two years later, Hotz and Magnusson founded Blixt & Co.

"I had taken the approach of what I thought most Americans think of as driven shooting, which is the classic image of upland shooting over the dogs, in a field," she says. "Lars said, 'What you've done is really beautiful, but we have to start over.'" He likens her misunderstanding to not knowing the difference between deep sea fishing and ➡➡



Invitation Nontransferable

Some experiences are best shared with people you like.

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fly-fishing. "Still fishing, yet so different," he says. "The material was fantastic, but the sport was not the same."

Naturally, the Swede and the American fell in love and got married. Nearly two decades later, the Magnussons have built an experience that, like their lives, is a union of two cultures. True to the sport's British roots, guests are expected to abide by a specific code of decorum, and traditional wool and tweed garments, like those crafted by the Savile Row tailor Leonard Logsdail in his Manhattan shop, are encouraged.

Guests often come to Idaho in groups, for two- or three-day shoots—sometimes booking their stays years in advance. Once they have settled in, guests are checked into the gun room (many bring their own firearms) and are invited to go clay shooting. "It gets

everyone warmed up and gets the cobwebs out of the barrels," Jennifer says. They close out the evening with dinner and drinks at the lodge with their hosts.

After breakfast the next morning, guests are introduced to their loaders—staffers who stand beside them during the drives and load their shotguns—and then "pull pegs" to determine where they will stand in the line as they move over the course of the day. Guests are transported to a drive site on one of Blixt & Co.'s sprawling properties—which have grown to some 5,000 acres—and the fun begins.

What guests don't see is a tightly choreographed production obscured by underbrush and dense woodland to ensure a successful shoot. Beaters, who work alongside the gamekeepers to directly drive the game, are given a head start to begin pushing the birds, either

pheasant or partridge, where they need to go. They pack "elevenses" for the guests, a British tradition of light morning snacks, and in converted barns or under neatly curated umbrellas the shooting party stops for a lunch prepared by Blixt's kitchen staff. After eating, they're taken for two more drives before returning to the lodge to dress for a more formal dinner.

One of the differences between shooting with Blixt & Co. and shooting in Britain is the price of admission—not in dollars but in pedigree. One guest who visits Blixt & Co. every year tells me he wouldn't be invited to shoot in England because his profession is not esteemed enough to allow him to rub shoulders with the upper class. At Blixt & Co., which offers shooting instruction and even a women's program, "it's a level playing field," Jennifer says. "It's a matter of your own skill set, which you can hone as much as you want."

The same egalitarian sensibility applies to how the property is run. In the UK it's not only the shooting that requires pedigree, the gamekeeping does too. Most gamekeepers are born into it, the sons of gamekeepers who are the sons of gamekeepers, and so on. By contrast, Elliott King, just 25 years old, is already head gamekeeper at Blixt & Co., having been raised on a shooting estate in the UK.

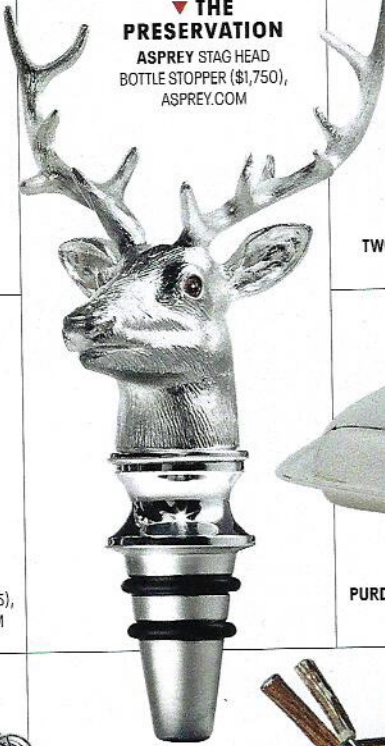
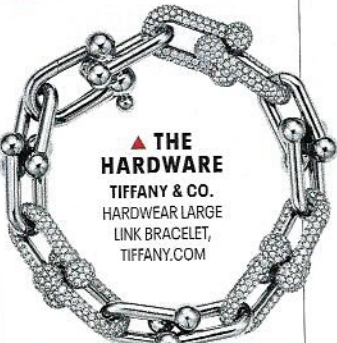
And true to the Blixt & Co. way, it's clear the staff's insights are held in high esteem. "When we have ideas, we share them," King says. "Jen says it all the time to us: Dreams are free." When one Scottish-born gamekeeper recalled how the shooting season back home began with the blowing of bagpipes, Lars and Jennifer immediately incorporated the tradition into their operation. Jennifer becomes emotional when she describes the sight of one of their gamekeepers coming up over a hill playing the bagpipes in his traditional hunting clothes, flanked by other gamekeepers. "My hair still stands up thinking about it," she says. "It was incredible."

Encapsulated in that single moment is an ethos deeply woven into Blixt & Co., one that sets it apart not only from other hunt clubs but from other luxury destinations. What Lars and Jennifer have built is an experience that requires patience and the understanding that their work necessitates a symbiotic relationship with nature. While guests enjoy indulgent comfort and care in every aspect of their time in Idaho, they must accept that the success of their trip comes down to something much larger than themselves: Mother Nature. "You can't force it," Lars says. "You can't make the grass grow." T&C



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