

# Highlands Hideaway

Journey to Andrew Carnegie's former Scottish Highlands summer home where a new breed of aristocrat now rules the roost. By Judy Alexandra DiEdwardo



HAD I LIVED AS A WEAVER OR A FARMER in the sleepy town of Dornoch, Scotland in the early 1900s, it's likely that Andrew Carnegie would have invited me to his beloved Skibo Castle for dinner. Joining me at the massive 40-foot long mahogany table would have been everyone from the Rockefellers and Helen Keller to Woodrow Wilson and Rudyard Kipling. King Edward VII might even have stopped by for dessert.

But as I glance around the table at my dinner mates, who each paid \$1,000 a day to experience the craftsmanship, opulence and splendor of the Edwardian era recreated at this fully restored castle, I suspect that Carnegie would not have approved: There wasn't a blue collar worker among us.

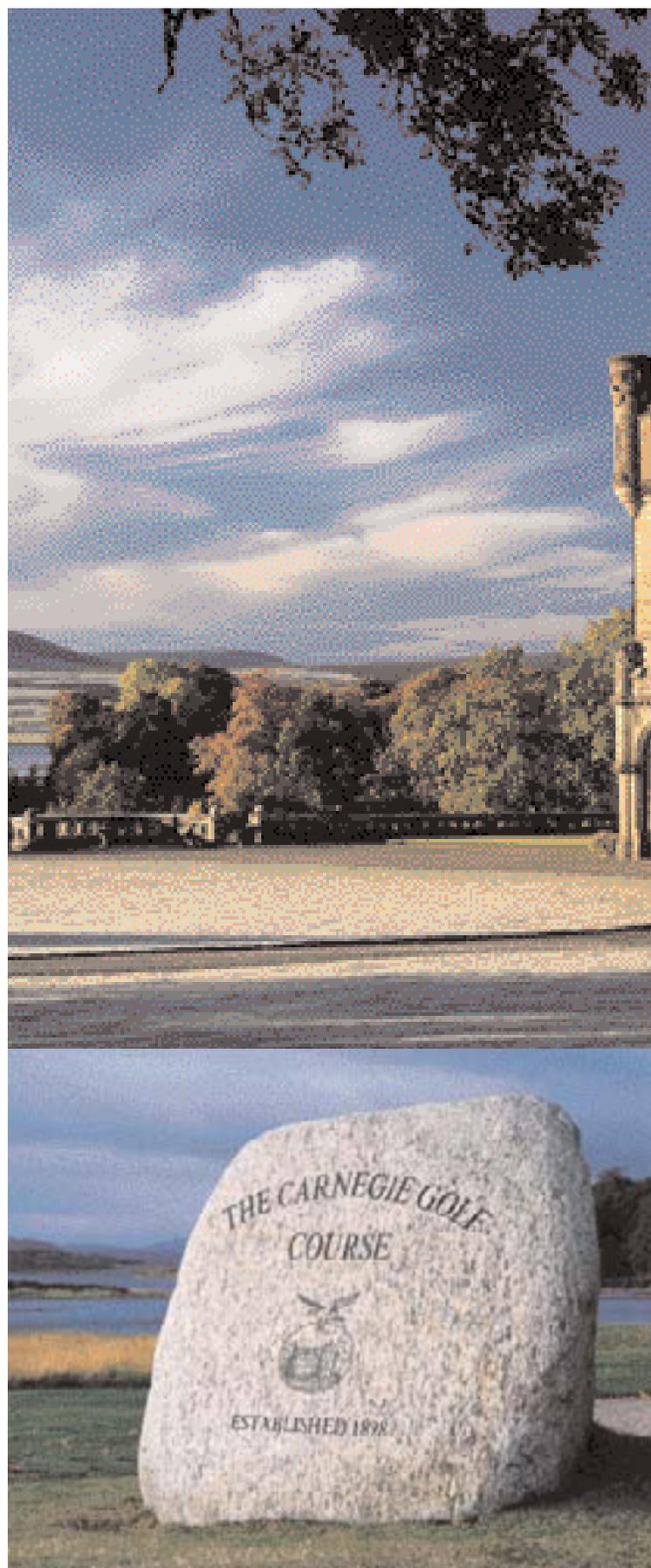
The five-foot, two-inch tall steel tycoon and philanthropist thrived on stimulating conversation shared by people of vastly diverse backgrounds. Even though he was one of the world's richest men by the time he was 30, great ideas—not wealth or people in positions of power—impressed him. He would have been as eager to hear about my crops as he would have been about Wilson's politics.

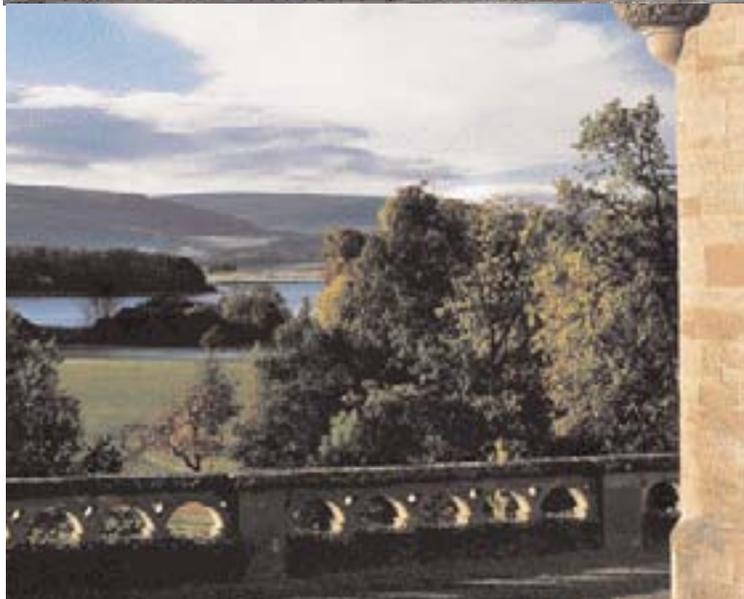
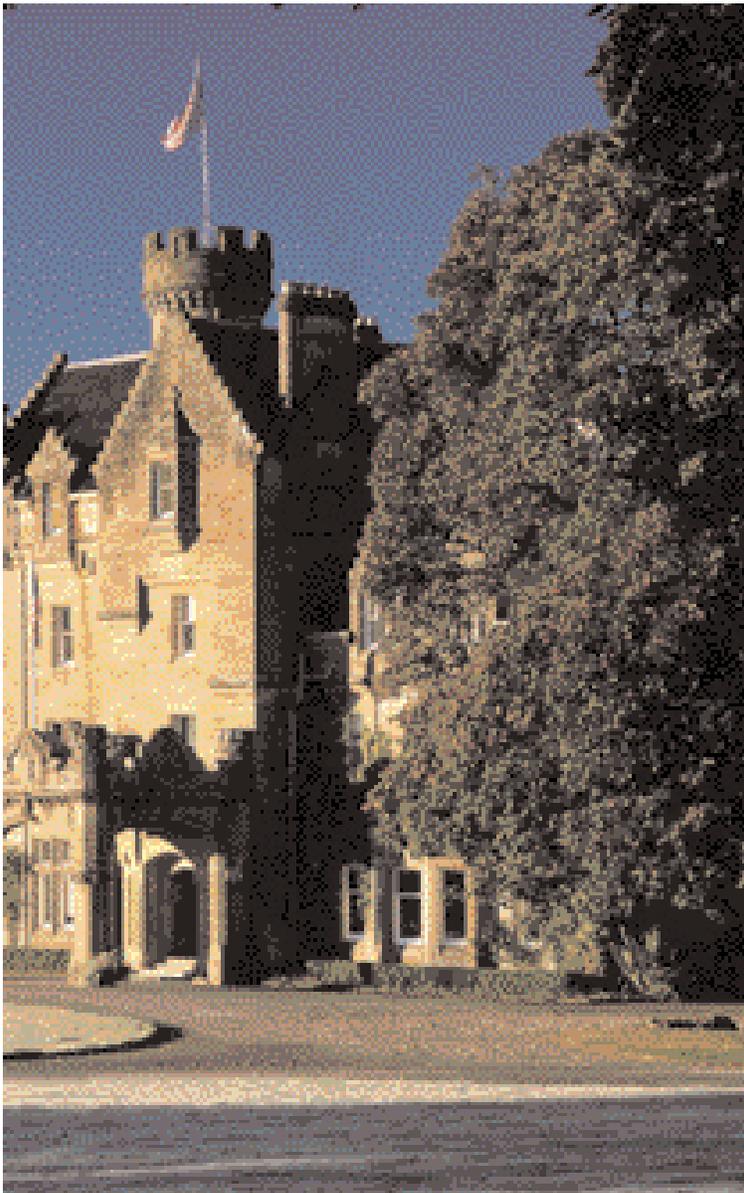
#### RAGS TO RICHES

Born in nearby Dunfermline on November 25, 1835, desperate poverty and unimaginable hardship forced Carnegie and his family to emigrate to the U.S. Over half of the town's population depended on the linen weaving trade for their livelihood. And, as hand loom weavers, the Carnegie family suffered from the effects of the Industrial Revolution when mass production of the steam loom left countless families out of work. The Carnegies were lucky enough to have afforded passage to America, where the ambitious 13-year-old found work making \$1.20 per week as a bobbin boy in a Pennsylvania cotton mill.

Ferociously driven, he moved rapidly through a succession of jobs at Western Union and the Pennsylvania Railroad where he rose through the ranks. He also parlayed a few small investments into larger ones, including investing in putting sleeping cars on trains. By the time he was 30, he had built the Carnegie Steel Company, giving him virtual control of steel production in America. By age 65, he sold the company to J. P. Morgan for \$480 million and devoted the rest of his life to philanthropic activities.

But despite his meteoric rise in business, Carnegie was motivated more by cultivating his innate abilities to help others through his achievements than he was accumulating wealth and shaking off the poverty of his youth. He was often heard to say that, 'The man who dies rich, dies disgraced,' for he strongly believed that those as fortunate as himself were duty bound to provide opportunities for the less fortunate. Carnegie believed that the rich had a moral obligation to give away their fortunes.





In his 1889 essay, *The Gospel of Wealth*, he asserted that “all personal wealth beyond that required to supply the needs of one’s family should be regarded as a trust fund to be administered for the benefit of the community.”

Although history books suggest that Carnegie was not loved by all, his record on philanthropy and his concern for others was impeccable and genuine. Even in his 30s Carnegie began disposing of his fast-accumulating fortune through innumerable personal gifts and through the establishment of various trusts. His first large gifts were made to his native town. Later he created seven philanthropic and educational organizations in the United States, including Carnegie Corporation of New York, and several more in Europe.

One of Carnegie’s lifelong interests was the establishment of free public libraries to make available to everyone a means of self-education. There were only a few public libraries in the world when, in 1881, Carnegie began to promote his idea. He and the Corporation subsequently spent over \$56 million to build nearly 3,000 libraries throughout the world.

By the time he died, he had given away over \$350 million (more than \$3 billion in today’s dollars). The foundations that he established have given away close to \$2 billion and have funded some of the century’s most significant initiatives.

#### HOME SWEET HOME

Longing for the tranquility of Scotland, Carnegie acquired Skibo Castle in 1898 as a summer home and base for his intensely active social life and philanthropic endeavors. In contrast to the often stark Scottish scenery, Skibo’s northern latitude creates an extraordinarily equable climate with the lowest annual rainfall and the most days of sunshine in Scotland. On occasion, the spectacular northern lights can even be seen.

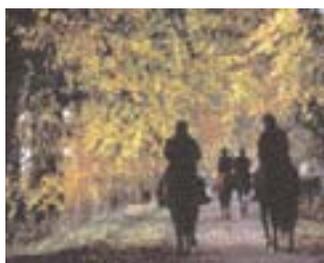
Carnegie approved the plans for the castle’s renovation and then passed supervision of the construction to his wife, Louise, whom he married a decade earlier. The additions extended to the south and west of the existing structure, providing over 200 rooms and almost 400 windows. There was a room and a view for every hour and mood of the day. Within two years, it was transformed into a magnificent rose-tinted baronial castle. The massive arsenal of beech trees that line the mile-long driveway remain, creating a dreamy leafy green canopy that ushers guests to Skibo’s front door.

Carnegie enjoyed his beloved Skibo for the last time in 1914 before leaving Scotland at the beginning of World War I. He spent the remainder of his life at his Lenox, Massachusetts estate where he died five years later at age 84.

Though changes in ownership have altered Carnegie’s original vision of Skibo, it allows guests an opportunity to emulate the lifestyle that was created and enjoyed by those lucky



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enough to have been a guest. Situated on the picturesque Dornoch Firth, the estate's 7,500 acres of meticulously manicured parks, gardens, woodlands, moors and lochs embody the tranquility and beauty of nature that Carnegie craved. It is also a wildlife refuge for many of the areas indigenous birds, waterfowl and other creatures that Carnegie sought to preserve.

Now owned since 1990 by private club developer Peter de Savary, founder of the St. James' Clubs and Americas Cup challenger, Skibo is a private residential golf and sporting club that's more of a manor house than it is a hotel. Although it is a private members club, potential new members are afforded a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to sample Skibo's offerings.

Upon arrival, guests are immediately impressed by the sense of being in someone's home, which was a feeling that Carnegie himself wanted all of his guests to have. And much like in Carnegie's day, members enjoy a full variety of sporting activities that include golf, horseback riding, tennis, salmon and trout fishing, falconry, and clay pigeon shooting. Long walks throughout the expansive estate are also a favorite pastime.

Skibo sleeps about 100 guests among its 21 rooms in the castle and a dozen one, two, three and four bedroom cottages scattered throughout the estate. They are typically reserved for families with children as well as those who want added privacy.

Despite its modern upgrades, Skibo embodies both the old and new. Time-worn photographs of Carnegie and friends are scattered throughout his office and library, and atop bookshelves and table tops along with images of its present-day guests—from the Connecticut couple enjoying a dream golf and spa getaway, to Matt Lauer and his wife who honeymooned there. Members include Sean Connery, Michael Douglas and Katharine Zeta Jones, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Tom Hanks and Jack Nicholson, to name a few.

A new multi-million dollar restoration effort is underway to further enhance the property. Six of the 18-holes on the 200-acre Carnegie Links championship golf course are being reconfigured to make it even more challenging. Made from the original 30-acre, nine-hole course, it is ranked as one of the top 20 golfing experiences in the world.

Skibo also features a stunning, turn-of-the-century mosaic marble indoor swimming pool and a full-service Clarins spa that is being redesigned and expanded to feature more treatment rooms, a lounge, and a state-of-the-art gym.

In 2000, Skibo Castle enjoyed added notoriety as Dornoch's most famous landmark when Madonna turned the 13th-century castle into tabloid fodder with her wedding to Guy Ritchie. They staged their wedding ceremony on the castle's picturesque rear portico, after which guests enjoyed a weekend of festivities throughout the castle and its cottages.

A small army of top-flight security guards, each equipped with



infrared goggles, were enlisted to keep the throng of photographers crowded at the end of Skibo's driveway at bay. Had Carnegie lived to see the day, he might have been amused and impressed by the tenacity of one ambitious photographer who managed to sneak past the guards and forage for hours through the thick forest before being detected. I smiled and wondered: Had he been a century earlier, he may have been invited for dinner.

#### GETTING THERE:

From London to Inverness, Scotland British Airways (800-452-1201) provides direct service. BritRail also provides convenient service to Inverness from London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports. (877-677-1066; [www.britrail.net](http://www.britrail.net))

#### RATES:

\$1,000 a day (two-day minimum stay) for a one-time opportunity to consider a membership. Annual membership is \$5,000 plus a \$700 day rate. Includes accommodations, food and beverage, unlimited golf and use of most sporting facilities. For reservations and information: 011-44-1862-894-600; [www.carnegieclub.co.uk](http://www.carnegieclub.co.uk) ❖