

£6m scheme to restore Skibo to its former glory



Peter Crome in the entrance hall . . . "we want to make it feel as it would have done at the time of Carnegie". PICTURE BY SANDY MCCOOK

by Sue Restan

THE exclusive retreat of the rich and famous at Skibo Castle is returning to its roots, as part of a £6million refurbishment.

Peter Crome, who took over as managing director of the Carnegie Club, at Clashmore, near Dornoch in Sutherland, almost a year ago, said yesterday the aim was to turn Skibo back into a traditional working estate.

Mr Crome said he had already spent £3million on improvements to the former home of philanthropist and steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, and planned to spend another £3million next year as part of a two-year development plan.

He is also keen to reintroduce farming, pheasant shooting and management of the woodlands to enrich the environment for the wide variety of wildlife that inhabits the 7,500-acre estate.

He said: "If it is not being looked after, it is deteriorating. We are restoring the whole estate and trying to bring it all back together again."

Wildlife

"We feel we have a responsibility as well as a desire to make the whole experience right, and woodland and wildlife management is an important part of the scheme. I think reviving the old country estate will make people feel more as though they are in the country."

They are also employing more gardeners, and he is keen to restore Skibo's greenhouses so guests can enjoy more home-grown fruit and vegetables.

Meanwhile, the buildings on the estate are being sympathetically restored to their former glory by Scottish builders and craftsmen.

So far, they have refurbished the golf clubhouse and improved the layout of parts of the Carnegie Links championship golf course.

Mr Crome said they had extended the members' lounge and dining area in the clubhouse. They have also built a new bar, with huge windows overlooking the Dornoch Firth, and provided new changing facilities.

The gym has been refurbished and fitted out with new fitness equipment.

Two of the estate's 11 lodges have been given an overhaul.

Work is now under way on the spa, which is due to open in December, and the swimming pool is to be given a £3million facelift next year.

An interior designer is refurbishing the members' sitting-rooms, lounges, dining-room and library in the castle.

Mr Crome is also keen to improve facilities for children at Skibo. He stressed all the work being carried out would maintain the character and spirit of the £1,000-a-night club, which now has around 500 members from around the world.

Mr Crome said he had bought around 30 paintings – some Victorian and some commissioned works of art from Scottish artists – and a bust of Andrew Carnegie to enhance

the atmosphere. "We want to make it feel as it would have done at the time when Carnegie lived here. It will be carried out so subtly that people will notice that something has changed, but will not know what has been done," he said.

Mr Crome has also increased the number of staff at the castle. During the summer, Skibo has employed almost 200 people.

A lot of money has been invested in improving staff facilities, including refurbishment of the staff dining-room and the provision of a gym for the use of employees.

Mr Crome said the two-year improvement plan was only the start of a continuing programme of improvements to the estate.

His appointment last October followed the sale of Skibo in May 2003 by UK-based entrepreneur Peter de Savary and a partnership of US investment fund Westbrook Partners.

At the time, it was announced it had been bought by a small group of Carnegie Club members, but it is now known it was bought by one American member, understood to be fund manager Ellis Short.