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Wonderful night for Clapton the country gent

HE HAS played at some of the most famous venues in the world, but none would have given Eric Clapton more pleasure than the private gig he was performing in Soho last night. Not only was he returning for the first time to the site of the legendary Marquee club, where his career began over 40 years ago, but his performance was in aid of the Countryside Alliance. These days the once wild rock star is a devoted family man and consummate

follower of country pursuits, fishing and shooting whenever he can. More than 300 people were crammed into Floridita restaurant, including Ben Goldsmith, the Earl of Portsmouth and the family of meat baron Lord Vestey, for the private concert. Guests paid £1,000 a table for the privilege. Restaurateur Ranald Macdonald — London chairman of the Countryside Alliance whose Pimlico eatery Boisdale is a partner with Floridita — tells me: 'The event was

over-subscribed. So many people wanted to hear Eric in a venue where he started his career. He is a terrific supporter of the Countryside Alliance and we are sure we will have raised a lot of money.' Cameras were banned from the event at which Clapton reprised hits from the Yardbirds and Cream. 'It was the most exclusive event I have ever been at,' says a fan. 'To have Clapton playing his guitar in a basement in Soho was really special.'