

Saturday 8th September 2012

theguardian

Sally Shallam

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You've probably heard of Minehead - home to Butlin's and a wide sandy beach - and also Hinkley Point, the nuclear power plant about 20 miles east of the resort, but you might not have come across Watchet. The pint-sized harbour town is poised on the rocky coastline between the two, the Bristol Channel ahead of it, Exmoor behind.

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The river Washford flows between cottages towards the sea, the heritage West Somerset Railway runs down to the port, which dates back 1,000 years, and the tiny main street is a Victorian gem. Get to the point... where's the B&B? In the middle of that high street - an old shop, by the look of things. I ring the bell. Here's Jason Robinson at the door to let me in. He and his wife, Annie, discovered the town while searching for a wedding venue. Former creatives at Disney, they fell in love

at work, and then with Watchet. On that wedding-plan trip they ended up buying a holiday house, then, when the old bric-a-brac shop next door came up for sale they bought that too. Jobs were chucked and renovation began just after last Christmas. This is their B&B's first week in business.

Jason tells me all this in the flagstoned "shopfront", perched at a wooden table large enough to seat all eight guests (so a place for sociable types). The vibe is industrial-luxe, the walls dark slate - a shade I liked a lot more before this washout summer - and at the far end is a fat (grey) sofa, cast-iron fireplace, a Mickey Mouse figure in a glass case and shelves of design books. As guest sitting rooms go, it's compact. I predict sunlounger-style sofa bagging at wine o'clock when all four rooms are full.

These are on the first and second floors: larger rooms at the front, smaller ones overlooking pretty courtyard gardens at the back. My monochrome bedroom faces a quaint-looking chemist's over the street and has a dressing area and bathroom with slipper bath, walk-in shower and full-size REN products.

The only splash of colour is a picture wall, but attention to detail comes in spades. Water in a stoppered bottle, a tea tray has sugar tongs and muffins in a paper bag, the black wardrobe contains iron and board and the TV is subtly placed. The shower has a recessed shelf and, joy, controls I can reach before stepping under the shower head.

Gripes? Dark roman blinds mean I have to choose between privacy or daylight, and the extractor fan goes on for ever.

A quick blast up on to Exmoor, and dinner at The Culbone, a pub serving Brixham fish and moorland beef, then sleep. Mmm, bed's wonderful.

Herby mushrooms and poached egg on toast, and fresh carrot and ginger juice go down very nicely in the morning. Never had breakfast sitting in a shop window before... gosh, the Quantock Pharmacy is busy. "Wish you were here," I scribble in my notebook, thinking of London friends, because Swain House is a rather chilled place to be.

SWAIN HOUSE
BOUTIQUE B&B

marathon a day for a week sound like fun? » Page 4

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Larkin around Hull » Page 8

Magical Malaysia
Style and sticky rice
in historic Penang

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Escapism
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Travel website Holiday guide to Dorset

Quick! Unpack your tent - with the country basking in late summer sun there's still time for one last camping trip. And there can be few more idyllic spots than Eweleaze Farm in Dorset. Situated between Durdle Door and Weymouth on the Jurassic coast, with views out across the curved coastline, it's "one of the loveliest places to camp in England," according to Cool Camping Guides founder Jonathan Knight, who lists his 10 favourite Dorset campsites in our interactive holiday guide to the county, featuring 80 expert tips. If you prefer breakfast delivered to your room over sausages cooked on a campfire, take a look at our round up of gorgeous small hotels and B&Bs, minutes from the beach to a former post office with two cosy rooms. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall put Dorset on the food map, but there's much more to the county than River Cottage. Nick Fisher, a mate of HFW

Fish Book, picks the best places in the county to eat seafood, whether it's fish and chips on Weymouth's harbour wall or crab sandwiches at the Watch House Cafe, the new little sister to the much-loved and praised Hive Beach Cafe. Meanwhile, on the beach at Osmington Mills, seashore forager John Wright serves Alastair Sawday an alfresco meal of laverbread oatcakes, deep-fried seaweed and winkles in our video slot. Finally, our list of the best music venues is proof that the sleepy Dorset depicted in films like Tamara Drewe is way off the mark. Read our top 10 guide to gig venues to find the best places to tap into the local music scene.

British boltholes

Somerset Swain House

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SOMERSETLIFE

Four-Second Commute

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So when they decided to get into the B&B business, it was with a view to creating something very out of the ordinary. The result is Swain House in Watchet, Somerset, a gem of a place to stay in a perfect jewel of a town.

Watchet's harbour is said to have inspired the opening lines of *The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose bronze statue now overlooks the water. Otherwise, it's pretty unknown. The Robinsons stumbled on this charming backwater while booking a nearby venue for their wedding. They were looking for B&Bs where their guests could stay.

"We loved the town," says Jason. "It's got a marina, a pretty harbour and the heritage West Somerset steam railway running down to the port. We thought it would make a beautiful escape from our London lives and when we saw there was a house on the market, we bought it and used it as a holiday home for a year.

"One week when we came down we found that the property next door, an unused shop, was for sale and I made a flippant remark about how we could buy it and do bed and breakfast.

"I had left my job as head of design for one of the Disney channels and was turning 40. It seems my mid-life crisis manifested itself by wanting a boutique B&B rather than a Porsche."

The two properties were probably one house originally, but had been separated

in the Victorian period, with a floor added above and an alley in between them. The upper floors still bridge above the passageway. Fortunately for the Robinsons the building was not listed, which Jason finds odd as most other properties in Watchet are at least Grade II.

"The shop was on the market at £125,000. It was a wreck inside and not really suited to a developer. However, as soon as we made an offer other buyers came out of the woodwork and so it went to sealed bids. We put in a bid for £137,000 which was what we reckoned we could afford, and it was accepted," says Jason.

That only left the small matter of change of use from a class A property to one which would be Class C. It's becoming easier to do this but even so there's reluctance in many places to lose shops because you don't get them back.

Undaunted, Jason went ahead with the application, dashing down from London for planning meetings to argue the case.

"They were not happy about losing a shop but it had been closed for years and I talked them round."

By now Annie was expecting a child so the move to Somerset was put on hold until Archie, their son, was three months old.

Jason was told the renovation work would take up to 16 weeks but, inevitably, it took longer. The entire shop had to be gutted, and new floors, electrics and plumbing installed.

Luckily no dry rot was found when the joists were revealed but an old well was discovered in what is now the B&B's

kitchen and Jason decided to have it capped.

"One day I hope that the next person who renovates the place will find the well, which is why I wanted it capped rather than filled in. I believe that it used to be outside the property but when it was rebuilt in Victorian times it somehow came to be inside. I don't think it was used after that."

In addition to all the refitting, there were, of course, building regulations to comply with as well as soundproofing to be installed in order that the Robinsons' house would not be disturbed by the guests next door. Rubber matting made from recycled car tyres and soundproofing boards were used and Jason says that the property is so quiet now that it's hard to tell if anyone is indoors.

The Robinsons employed a private building regulations contractor instead of the council employee, and Jason believes that this was a more efficient solution, which cost only a few hundred pounds extra.

Throughout the process, Jason had been researching other B&Bs and he visited two which were particularly notable: The Ashton, in Lancaster, and The Reading Rooms, in Margate. Both are luxury guest houses with a small number of rooms.

The owners were happy to talk through the problems and experience of running such an establishment. It emerged that it was not worth doing your own laundry: one of the owners, Louise, from The Reading Rooms, said she remembered being up until 3am ironing sheets and in tears because she knew she would have to rise by 7am to do breakfast.

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"I would absolutely love to do another one, perhaps something that would be classified as a hotel, but my first priority is to make a success of this venture," he says.

Four-second COMMUTE

To misquote Samuel Johnson, Annie and Jason Robinson weren't tired of life, but they were tired of London – and last year they fulfilled their dream of moving to Somerset full time



somerset.greatbritishlife.co.uk

WORDS: CAROL BURNS
PHOTOGRAPHY: EWEN MACDONALD
68 SOMERSET LIFE December 2012

It was the weekend retreat that has become a way of life for the Robinsons, a small house in the seaside town of Watchet, where the couple finally escaped their hectic careers to open up a boutique B&B with their baby son Archie. The couple discovered the up and coming town of Watchet while scoping out guest accommodation for their wedding. They found the small house on Swain Street and six weeks later, it was theirs. The couple spend many happy weekends at the house, all the time planning what Annie calls their 'great escape'. And when the permanently closed sign of the dilapidated junk shop across the cobblestones turned into a for sale sign, the couple sold up their London homes and bought it, spending around £250,000 turning it into Swain House, a boutique B&B already attracting the fashionable and discerning from London looking for a place to stay while they explore the surrounding area.

somerset.greatbritishlife.co.uk

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Creating the B&B was a way for them to move to Somerset permanently. "People have been really supportive and welcoming," says Annie. "We wanted to live here and contribute to Watchet. We never saw it open, it was empty when we moved here," says Annie. "There's a really community here, people say good morning to you. We both grew up in a rural setting and we wanted that nursery from 7am - 7pm every day, which is what a lot of our friends in London do. And we don't have to. "I used to do a four-hour commute - now it's about four seconds across a cobbled path in a beautiful seaside town." The couple spent two years working out how to do it - and admit the planning was a great adventure in itself. The three-story 18th century building now houses four mini-suites, featuring a

bedroom, dressing area and bathroom. Each room is dominated by a king size bed and a feature wall of blown up detail from old paintings, make the most of the building's era and add a real touch of glamour to the rooms. Thought and love has gone into every square inch of the place, really earning itself the boutique title. Roll top baths, and even placing the shower controls outside the stall so it can be switched on and the temperature moderated before stepping in, all go to make this a luxurious stay. Downstairs a spacious sitting area features a single large table made from reclaimed floorboards where B&B guests gather to enjoy locally sourced breakfasts cooked by Jason, who can often be found in the professional kitchen across the hall, creating home-baked banana cakes

Sunday 24th February 2013

SUNDAY EXPRESS

Disney magic rubs off on B&B

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PROPERTY

Edited by ANDREA WATSON



MASTERPIECE: Murals based on paintings from the National Gallery decorate the rooms of boutique Swain House in Somerset

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ANDREA WATSON meets one couple who turned their holiday home into a stylish interior-designed business

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TURN TO PAGE 83



TRANSFORMATION: Jason and Annie Robinson bought the empty shop next to their property then used mood boards to help them choose the decor

CONFIDENTIAL AGENT

JE VON TRIPPE on why you should never ask an Albanian to tidy your lack of kerb appeal

YOUNG man has just nipped into the office to talk over the sale of his "estate" in a nearby commuter village. In addition to the refitting, there were, of course, building regulations to comply with as well as soundproofing to be installed in order that the Robinsons' house would not be disturbed by the guests next door.

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'Next we'd like to open

THE BREEZE BLOCK HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A LOW STONE WALL TOPPED WITH GOLD-EFFECT RAILING'

and the side alley full of debris and dustbins. I go inside. Thank heavens things are a bit better. Even though the young couple have no housekeeping skills, they have spent money on refurbishing and the kitchen is really quite nice.

So after a quick inspection and enquiry about a price, I reel back in astonishment when the young man says: "We want a quick sale so we are looking for around £250,000."

Now, I have already mentally written "DIRTY" on the particulars because the £275,000 on the particulars is for a property does have three bedrooms and the village is "desirable" with good local schools and 50-minute trains to London Bridge.

Were it not for that, I would be making my excuses and departing. Instead, I venture to suggest that a bit of TLC on the front would help the sale no end.

The young man looks a bit surprised and asks what needs to be done. So, I state the blooming obvious and after a rather unpleasant moment he agrees to get his man along to do the necessary.

A month later I go back to see whether we are now in a position to work his magic. The Albanian builder has done a good job or what would pass for one in his home town of Durrës: the breeze block has been replaced by a low stone wall topped with yellow and white glass effect railings.

The front door has been painted yellow and shrubs have been ripped out and replaced by ranks of marigolds. The small patch of lawn is now an area of glassy white shingle and the alley has been blocked off by a wooden gate which for some reason hangs two feet above the ground. Behind it all squats the ugly brick house, looking angrier than ever.

"Lovely," I say as the young man shows me the work. "I haven't seen marigolds for ages." Always show enthusiasm, that's my motto... and sometimes my downfall.

FOR SALE: Tavistock Railway Station

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coast

Lesley Gillilan

When Jason and Annie Robinson opened Swain House last year, they brought a dash of London life to time-warped Watchet. Above their converted 19th-century shop – a junk shop before they turned it into the region's first boutique B&B – they offer four stylish rooms.

All feature king-size beds, digital wallpaper (a floor-to-ceiling detail from a National Portrait Gallery masterpiece) and the kind of luxury bathrooms you'd expect to find in an expensive hotel (think indulgent slipper baths and walk-in power-showers).

Rates include a hearty Somerset breakfast, home-baked cakes and a wealth of local knowledge.

Doubles from £125 per night (01984 631038, swain-house.com).

WEEKEND in...

WEST SOMERSET

From show-stopping *views*, wild moorland and vintage steam trains to *boutique B&Bs*, intimate *cafés* and *spectacular sunsets*, this idyllic part of the UK is the ideal retreat

words Lesley Gillilan



At Exmoor, the views across coastal farmland towards Porlock Bay are inspiring

Sandwiched between the Quantock Hills and the wilds of Exmoor, this quiet corner of the Somerset coast extends an open invitation to step back in time. A place without motorways, mega-stores or much in the way of urban life (the seaside Minehead, is the region's largest town), its attractions include thatched tea rooms in pretty villages, ancient mineral harbours, a classic steam railway and miles of long and sometimes challenging woodland walks and giddy cliff-top vistas from hills that swoop down to the sea. In April, the area wakes up to the inevitable crowds of visitors (most of them heading for Minehead's promenade, medieval Dunster or the beaches of Porlock Bay); a walking festival (exmoorwalkingfestival.co.uk) begins at the end of the month; and there are emerging signs of 21st-century living, like foodie restaurants and a boutique B&B. But even in summer, you will find lonely corners – just you, a gaggle of Exmoor ponies, a whisper of wind in the trees, or the Bristol Channel tide washing over pebbles.

STAYING OVER...

SWAIN HOUSE WATCHET

When Jason and Annie Robinson opened Swain House last year, they brought a dash of London life to time-warped Watchet. Above their converted 19th-century shop – a junk shop before they turned it into the region's first boutique B&B – they offer four stylish rooms. All feature king-size beds, digital wallpaper (a floor-to-ceiling detail from a National Portrait Gallery masterpiece) and the kind of luxury bathrooms you'd expect to find in an expensive hotel (think

indulgent slipper baths and walk-in power-showers). Rates include a hearty Somerset breakfast, home-baked cakes and a wealth of local knowledge. Doubles from £125 per night (01984 631038, swain-house.com).

MILLER'S AT THE ANCHOR PORLOCK WEIR

Martin Miller (the man behind the famous Miller's Antiques Price Guides) is clearly in love with the area because he keeps opening hotels here. Part of his so-called 'Exmoor Collection', the Anchor is right on the harbour at Porlock Weir. Like most of Miller's many



ventures, it's flamboyant, eccentric, crammed with antiques and furnished with a jumble of books and curios, shabby-chic sofas, open fires, four-poster beds and a palette of vivid colours. Doubles from £90 (01643 862753, millersuk.com)

SHELL HOUSE PORLOCK WEIR

Within spitting distance of Porlock pebble beach, this award-winning contemporary house gazes at the sea from glassy, open-plan spaces that extend out onto a waterside deck. You could spend all day here just watching the birds, the boat

Monday 8th July 2013

GRAZIA

Boutique Buckets & Spades

ART HOUSE CHIC

Swain House, Watchet, Somerset

Watchet is an ancient harbour town in Somerset that's a bit of find. It's unspoiled and perched on the coast with Exmoor behind it. On the well-preserved Victorian High Street is Swain House, a B&B housed in what used to be a couple of village shops. Step through the front door and enter a stylish, sophisticated pad that's decorated in shades of muted grey. Bedrooms are decorated in Farrow & Ball neutrals with the eye-catching feature wall consisting of a mural of a painting from the National Gallery or the National Portrait Gallery. The ensuite has a slipper bath, double walk-in shower, fluffy bathrobes and REN toiletries. If you're up for extra indulgence, luxuries such as homemade truffles or a bottle of champagne on ice can be ordered. While you're there: as Watchet is deep in the heart of cider country, it would be rude not to check out the local brew at Torre Cider Farm (torrecider.com). If you're feeling adventurous, have a go at coastering —travelling along the base of sea cliffs (activeadventuresw.co.uk).

The lowdown: from £125 per night. Visit swain-house.com or call 01984 631038.

MODERN

With A View. Brighton seaside location to do still love Brighton. One city beaches, it has a lively, A Room With A View gem. It has nine rooms (ew) in a smart listed ce spot opposite the the Palace Pier. re: try the latest craze UP Yoga at Brighton i a paddleboard in the .co.uk). 20 per night. Call 01273 withaviewbrighton.com.

Murals of famous paintings adorn the walls in Swain House



6 ART HOUSE CHIC
Swain House, Watchet, Somerset
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The Escape does retro chic perfectly

5 RETRO FUN
Escape, Llandudno, Conwy, North Wales
Chic and fun, the Escape B&B makes up retro 1970s styling with designer details. Room One's technicolour crocheted throw and orange Eames-style chairs are the perfect foil to the muted grey décor and wooden floors. And breakfast — wow, the full Welsh is delicious and made from local produce. **While you're there:** Llandudno's huge sandy beaches await you. Take the cable car up the Great Orme, the hill that backs on to the town. Or go kite surfing at Kinnel Bay (kiteboardinglessons.co.uk). The lowdown: from £89 per night, visit escapeandh.co.uk or call 01492 877776.

7. SHABBY CHIC

The Gallivant Hotel, Camber Sands, East Sussex
The Gallivant at Camber Sands has a touch of the Hamptons about it — a clapperboard corner of New England set on the Sussex coast. Rooms stretch around the front, motel style; inside it's all billowing white curtains, shabby chic and white wooden floors. The Gallivant restaurant, the Beach Bistro, up dishes such as seared Ry scallops with trout tartar, or champagne jelly — suck in! **While you're there:** stroll the road to the vast dune-fr beach of Camber Sands, w breathtaking in scale — the sand seeming to go on to sea twinkling on the horizon. Give kite-surfing a go — C expansive beach is ideal. Kite Surf Centre is located eastern end of the sands per lesson (thekitesurf.co.uk). And just up the road, the Rye is a medieval gem, shops and good pubs. **The lowdown:** rates at Gallivant start from £ in July. Visit thegallivant.co.uk or call 01797 225057.



8 TOT

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THE COUNTRY MAGAZINE
EXMOOR

Interiors

Almost a year ago to the day, we packed our bags and moved our lives from London to the Somerset coast. We'd stumbled across the little town of Watchet during a hunt for possible B&B accommodation for our wedding at nearby St Audries three years previously.

The sun was shining, bunting was fluttering in the breeze and steam trains were pulling in and out of Watchet's small and perfectly restored station. It was love at first sight.

We bought a second home on Swain Street at that time and when the next-door bric-à-brac shop came onto the market as well a year later, we saw an opportunity to finally jump ship from our hectic lives working in the media in London and embark on a truly life-changing adventure.

By the time we arrived permanently in Watchet our family had grown, with the arrival of our son Archie, and this had only served to further confirm our belief in what we were planning: to convert the shop into a boutique B&B and create a stylistically different overnight offering for the area.

We worked closely with our architect to create four suites and a guest living/dining area from the interior of the building, retaining the original Victorian shop front and as much of the exterior character as possible. We had an idea of the look and feel that we wanted and finalised this by

piecing together an extensive 'look book' - compiled from two years of researched and saved images.

"Stripping out the building led to rubble and then more rubble before the original features could begin to be restored - and in some cases revealed; among the secrets which the building threw up was a seventeenth-century well in the kitchen!"

We wanted a contemporary, rustic look with a high end, luxe design edge to it. No traditional florals, where possible natural finishes and materials, a simple, crisp, colour palette and, as we've both worked for years in design, tremendous attention to detail. We'd both travelled extensively with our jobs and stayed in some great and not-so-great hotels, so we wanted to create somewhere we'd want to stay in ourselves.

Building work ran for longer than expected, with a large team of builders on site every day. Having originally estimated four months, construction time nearly doubled, with the B&B finally opening in mid-August 2012. Along the way, the building threw up a few surprises, not least a seventeenth-century well in the kitchen! And there was an extraordinary amount of rubble, with 40 tonnes needing to be removed from the ground floor alone!

We were lucky as we had some real craftsmen in the team and they shared our passion for achieving an amazing level of finish.

The rooms are luxurious but uncluttered - nothing is fussy. This applies throughout, from the choice of artwork - wall-sized murals of details from Georgian paintings - to the most simple, beautifully designed slipper baths we could source. Quality was hugely important to us and we wanted that to be present in everything we chose for the interior. We hope that our future guests get as much out of our new-found paradise as we have.



Swain House Boutique B&B
INTERIORS
WORDS by Jason & Annie Robinson

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We worked closely with our architect to create four suites and a guest living/dining



Lisa Helmanis

Sleepy seaside town, check. Quirky, period building, check. Ideal English retreat for a seasonal stroll? Swain House has it all. Lying in a quiet, unhurried corner of the Watchet, one of the few coastal towns to still have local people living year round with tea shops and junk stores to loiter in, is the surprisingly design-conscious Swain House.

Owners Jason and Annie, London Design types, married in the area, and over time, made the move from big smoke to rural retreat. A chance to buy the Victorian shop and townhouse spurred them on to create this small, considered B&B. With only 4 snug rooms in this long lean building, these are not suites for lounging.

But as a base for exploring the area, they make an ideal choice. Designer Jason has created arresting features such as classical portraits writ large, lending old fashioned richness to these modern rooms. Freestanding baths, REN products and exceptional breakfasts lift this property out of the realm of your standard B&B.

Although there isn't a restaurant, the long table in the dining room makes for a convivial breakfast with other guests as you gaze out on passers by, and the couple are happy to organise little extras such as champagne, strawberries or flowers in the room.

With civilised breakfast times from 8.30 to 10, sleepy Watchet with its welcome absence of gastro pubs (though great

country pub food is a short cab ride away) is a real retreat. Add in the plush beds of Swain House and you have permission to spend your weekend doing absolutely nothing at all. Bliss.

Highs:

- The attention to detail in this small find
- The sea is but a short walk, with junk stores to raid along the way

Lows:

- You can't walk to a good pub for food. But a short taxi ride will give you lots of options

Inside Track:

Best room:

All four are beautiful, but the street-facing rooms at the front are a little larger. We love Room 1, with digital wallpaper showing off a dramatic image of Charlotte Sophia of Mecklenburg-Strelitz.

Best dish:

Herby mushrooms and poached egg on toast, or the delicious savoury pancakes cooked by Jason.

Insider fact:

Moody, atmospheric Watchet was striking enough to inspire poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Enough said.

www.redonline.co.uk/travel/book-places-to-stay/swain-house-review





John Gregory-Smith

Sometimes people just get things right, and this is exactly what happened when Jason and Annie got married and left London to open Swain House, a boutique bed and breakfast in the coastal town of Watchet.

Using their design know how, they successfully redeveloped a wonderful old townhouse from a junk shop into a slick 4-room bed and breakfast.

From the high street the building retained the look and feel of the local neighbourhood, but a huge glass window into the dining room revealed a beautifully executed, modern room, with grey walls, contemporary lights that hung low over a well-worn oak table and a fabulous feature fireplace.

A smiling Jason met us at the gate and took us up to our room. It had all the trappings of a boutique hotel; huge bed, massive vintage wardrobe, a feature wall and a magnificent bathroom with a massive roll top bath. It was heaven.

We loved this stunning designer Bed and Breakfast in the costal town of Watchet.

Watchet is a sleepy town right on the sea, in West Somerset, surrounded by rolling hills and massive stony beaches. It was perfect for long walks and longer pints at this slightly blustery time of year.

We were directed over the hills to the nearby fossil beach, a quintessentially British beach covered in rocks and loads of dog walkers. And as the rain started we found ourselves by the fire in the Bell Inn , before heading to the local curry house for dinner.

Jason had built an immaculate kitchen, and the following morning in his chef's jacket he set to and made a fabulous breakfast. On the menu was full English and homemade pancakes with local bread, fresh smoothies and loads of newspapers. It was a perfect end to our weekend away and we have already been planning our return.

www.eattravelive.com/travel/swain-house-bed-breakfast

Click here to book >



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Swain House Bed and Breakfast

We loved this stunning designer Bed and Breakfast in the costal town of Watchet.



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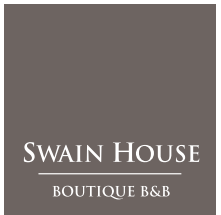
ELLE

May 2014

SWAIN HOUSE, WATCHET, SOMERSET

Tucked away in the sleepy harbour town of Watchet this designer B&B is big on style. Previously an 18th century shop, its owners (former Disney execs) have restored it in shades of white, dove and slate grey, with treats like roll-top baths, cast-iron radiators, and huge murals based on National Gallery paintings. Flop on to the sofa in front of the fire after walks along the coastal path from the harbour to Blue Anchor Bay.

48 Swain Street, Watchet, Somerset TA23 OAG (01984 631 038; swain-housacom), Doubles from £125 B&B



break
The temperature's rising...
country air

ARCHANGEL, FROME, SOMERSET
Frome is a cute town with farmers' markets and cobbles, and the Mendip Hills nearby. It's pretty ancient too, with Archangel dating back to 1311 - the inside of its restaurant still has the original medieval passageway bisecting it. Upstairs, six of the 10 striking rooms have slipper baths, and there are views over the rooftops. Angel murals look down on you while you sleep, peacefully - despite the buzz from the bar and restaurant below.
1 King St, Frome, Somerset BA11 1BH (01373 456 111; archangelfrome.com), Doubles from £90, room only

THE LAUNDRY, TY MAWR COTTAGES, LLANFRYNACH, POWYS
Fancy a romantic weekend in the country? This high-spec cottage for two has it all: wood-burning stove, suite bathroom with Anne Semonin toiletries. There's a swish, gadget-filled kitchen if you want to cook, and Michelin-starred food at The Walnut Tree Inn (walnuttreeinn.com) if you don't. Add to that the private garden, stress-busting views across the fields, bracing walks and waterfalls on its doorstep, and this converted farm building is pretty much the perfect rural bolthole.
Ty Mawr Cottages, Llanfrynach, nr Brecon, Powys LD3 7BZ (01874 685 414; sugarandloaf.com) prices from £430 for three nights

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48 Swain Street, Watchet, Somerset TA23 OAG (01984 631 038; swain-house.com), Doubles from £125 B&B

NO 12, CIRENCESTER, GLOUCESTERSHIRE
In the pretty market town of Cirencester, No 12 is a Grade II listed Georgian townhouse that is every inch the cool Cotswold retreat. Think beamed ceilings and a smattering of antiques. No 12's four charming bedrooms have shuttered windows, sleigh beds and merino wool blankets. Eat breakfast in the lavender-filled garden, before taking a walk in the nearby bluebell woods.
12 Park Street, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 2BW (01285 840 232; no12cirencester.co.uk), Doubles from £120 B&B

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Sunday 17th May 2014

The Telegraph

Swain House Watchet, Somerset

Jason and Annie Robinson opened Swain House two years ago in the centre of Watchet, a little harbour town on the Bristol Channel, about 15 miles north-west of Taunton. The couple originally bought the Georgian townhouse next door (now their home), before acquiring this place, which had a shop at street level, now the guest living-dining room with big communal table, comfy sofas and industrial-looking lamps. The four bedrooms are simple and stylish and each has a wall emblazoned with a detail from a famous portrait from the National Gallery, and spacious ensuite bathrooms with freestanding roll-top baths. Swain House offers cooked breakfasts, home-baked bread and cakes, and light charcuterie suppers with local wines, beers and ciders. Be sure to do the Mineral Line walk, along a disused railway that once brought iron ore down from the mines in the Brendon Hills, or the three-mile cliff scamper to the seaside village of Blue Anchor. There, you can catch the charming West Somerset Steam Railway back to Watchet.

All rooms cost £125 including breakfast (01984-631038; swain-house.com).

Four of the best West Country seaside B&Bs, by Francesca Syz

TRAVEL

Devon Harbour House St Ives, Cornwall Pottering down the Warren, a pedestrianised cobbled street lined with historically cherty cottages that leads into town from the railway station in St Ives, it is a challenge to imagine you are about to arrive at a chic six-room B&B run by two graduates of the world-renowned Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne in Switzerland. But then you do. After meeting at college, Angela and Oliver Novemaz spent a decade working their way round some of Europe's best hotels, before settling in St Ives to pursue their dream of opening the sort of guesthouse that they would like to stay in themselves, which they did early last year. The result is an elegant, art-filled home in a style that is part Cornish seaside, part retro mid-century modern, but also friendly and relaxing. Angela and Oliver go the extra mile on every level, from the organic breakfasts in the light-filled dining room and the aperitifs served in the freit snug (or sunny terrace, depending on the weather), to organising picnics for the beach and tickets to private views in the best galleries in town. **The details** Doubles from £140 (01738-793267; freitshouse.co.uk).



email travel.magazine@telegraph.co.uk



Strate Barton House Dartmouth, Devon There is an un-B&B-like decadence about 16th-century Strate Barton House in the seaside village of Strate in the South Hams area of Devon, five miles from Dartmouth. Owned and run by Stuart Ulster and Kevin Hooper, who moved down from London six years ago, it has six bedrooms, each with its own striking colour scheme, Graham & Brown wallpaper, sleigh beds and Asian artifacts including wall sculptures from the Far East. While five of the rooms are in the main house, the sixth, the two-floor Cottage Suite, has its own private entrance, with a bedroom and living room with a log-burning stove. Tea and home-made cakes are served in a drawing room with an open fire on arrival, and there is a dining room where the full English breakfast is served. There is also outdoor seating on the terrace and in the garden overlooking the sea. The South West Coastal Path is a two-minute walk away, with Blackpool Sands a 20-minute walk in one direction and Slapton Sands a 20-minute walk in the other. **The details** Doubles from £106 (01473-822058; wolseylodges.com).

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Westcroft Kingsand, Cornwall Sarah and Dylan McLeese Taylor, the owners of this stylish, characterful B&B, housed in a restored 1760s coaching inn 20 yards from the beach in the former fishing village of Kingsand on the Rame Peninsula, both worked punishing hours as London-based social workers in previous lives, so they know just what burnt-out city dwellers need from a precious weekend away. A short ferry hop from Plymouth (so a car isn't essential), the B&B has three eclectically furnished bedrooms. One, with a large four-poster bed, can be rented on its own for £90 or with a living room next door for £140; another has hand-painted wallpaper and a claw-foot bath, and the third, the thrillingly named Clock Tower Suite, takes up the whole top floor. Hearty breakfasts, served in-room or in a small dining room downstairs, are available at a time to suit you. The B&B also has an art gallery in a converted boatshed behind. Guests can visit the gallery out of hours and even borrow artwork to hang in their rooms during their stay. **The details** Doubles from £90 (01752-823216; westcroftguesthouse.co.uk). Next week: children's camps in the UK

Essentials

Hurray for the luxury B&B! Swain House, Somerset

Watchet is an ancient Harbour town that's a cute, unspoiled gem. On the well-preserved Victorian high street is Swain House, a stylish B&B that's decorated in shades of muted grey. The bedrooms have a striking portrait feature wall, while your en suite boasts a slipper bath, double walk-in shower and fluffy bathrobes. And if you're up for a little indulgence, truffles or Champagne can be arranged.

HOW MUCH?

Rooms are £125 for two, including breakfast. For details, visit swain-house.com, or call 01984 631038.



THE TIMES

The Cool Hotel Guide: Swain House, Watchet, Somerset

Watchet is where Samuel Taylor Coleridge, while on a walking tour, was inspired to write *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. There's a statue of an "ancient mariner" on the esplanade overlooking the high sea walls of the marina - the Bristol Channel can get very rough. Swain House is a short stroll from the statue, in the centre of Watchet (population about 3,700), and it makes a perfect base for exploring the nearby countryside and coast by foot.

In a nutshell

It's easy to find, in the centre of town next to a run of antique shops in an 1890s townhouse. There are four rooms in this stylish little B&B, run in a laid-back but efficient manner by Jason and Annie Robinson, both of whom previously worked for Disney in London (which explains the small model of Mickey Mouse in the lounge) but moved to west Somerset to be close to relatives. Swain House opened two years ago.

What are the rooms like?

They're surprisingly large and each has a wall poster showing a detail from a work of art from either the National Gallery or the National Portrait Gallery. In room four, for example, there's a picture of the wistful-looking female figure depicted by Claude-Marie Dubufe in his painting *The Surprise* (from the 1820s), while in room one you expect a close-up of the hand of Charlotte Sophia of Mecklenburg-Strelitz,

as painted by Allan Ramsay (1762). Room two shows another painting by Ramsay - of a rather self-satisfied King George III. While these features might sound intrusive, they somehow work alongside the neutral colour schemes of the rooms: pencil-grey carpets and whitewashed walls. The spotless bathrooms have slate floors and REN products.

Which is the best room?

Room four is at the front on the second floor with a detail of the ruby-ringed hands of Christina of Denmark by Hans Holbein the Younger (1538). It gets afternoon sunlight through the sash windows.

So what is the food like?

The cooked breakfasts are just right, with a choice of either a full English, vegetarian (eggs, "herby mushrooms", halloumi, roasted tomatoes and vegetarian sausage), or pancakes with either berries, yoghurt and maple syrup or bacon with a poached egg. Jason serves the food swiftly, along with fresh coffee and juice. My full English was top-notch and not at all greasy: crispy bacon, pork sausage, poached egg and roasted tomato with tasty herby mushrooms. For dinner the evening before I went to the Spice Merchant (01984 633010), a brilliant nearby Indian restaurant recommended by Jason, who said "it knocks out most places on Brick Lane" - and he was right.

Who goes there?

Most visitors are hikers. Brandi Carlile, the American folk singer, has stayed.

What else is there to do?

Take a ride on the West Somerset Railway (west-somerset-railway.co.uk). There's a stop at Watchet, and you can hear the hoot of the steam trains from Swain House. The line is England's longest preserved steam railway. The Quantock Hills are close by and you can go along the coastal path, which becomes the South West Coast Path at Minehead, running 630 miles to Dorset (southwestcoastpath.com).

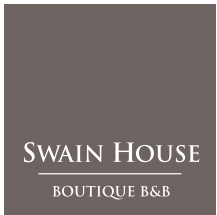
The highs, the lows, the verdict

Eight out of ten
Good value big rooms in an interesting spot, but there's a bit of traffic noise.

Need to know

Swain House (01984 631038, swain-house.com), 48 Swain Street, Watchet, West Somerset TA23 0AG; B&B doubles from £125; no wheelchair access rooms; single occupancy rooms from £110 Monday-Thursday.





Good Housekeeping

Let's go to a Hotel by the sea Swain House, Watchet, Somerset

Design-conscious Swain House is the ideal place to do absolutely nothing. Classical portraits and free-standing baths lend an old-fashioned richness to the four modern rooms and, outside there are shops and junk stores to linger in. There is no restaurant, but the long table in the dining room makes for a convivial breakfast with other guests. From £135.00 per room.

ome
for happy-ever-after
treat for Mother's Day

Romantic chic The Reading Rooms, Margate
A picture of place on one of the prettiest Georgian
picturesque Margate, there's nothing to reveal
inside this painstakingly restored townhouse
a Michelin hotel guide sticker in the window
your own seaside bolthole stripped back
the 18th century.
just like life in the 18th century.
preserved, just like life in the 18th century.
more luxurious. From £130 per room.

Romantic getaway
Westcott Guesthouse,
Kingsand, Cornwall
You'll find this boutique B&B in
the sleepy town of Kingsand and it's
something of a love nest. The Clock
Tower Suite is hugely impressive.
Tucked away in the rafters, it's a
gorgeous getaway that's tailor-made
for a special occasion. The views
of the starry night sky from the
claw-foot bath are spellbinding. A
truly special spot. Rooms from £120.

GOOD TO GO

LAKES RETREAT
Number 43, Arncliffe,
Cumbria
This Victorian townhouse
is chiefly furnished and
prides itself on the little
touches - from the
Egyptian cotton sheets
to the daily food platters
brought to your room every
day. It's the location that's
the biggest selling point,
though, with incredible
views on your doorstep
as well as a great pub, a
fish and chip shop and
a promenade of shops
nearby. From £125 per room.

RELAXING BREAK
Swain House, Watchet,
Somerset
Design-conscious Swain
House is the ideal place
to do absolutely nothing.
Classical portraits and
free-standing baths lend an
old-fashioned richness to
the four modern rooms
and, outside, there are tea
shops and junk stores
to linger in. There's no
restaurant, but the long
table in the dining room
makes for a convivial
breakfast with other guests.
From £135 per room.

Let's go to HOTEL BY THE SEA

Britain does
seaside holidays
brilliantly. With
so much coast
to choose from,
and so many
gorgeous hotels
to check out,
what are you
waiting for?

Retro resort

The Midland Hotel, Morecambe
In its 1930s heyday, this was the definitive British
seaside resort, but the building was requisitioned
during the Second World War and made into a
military hospital. Happily, the historic hotel was
restored to its Art Deco glory 10 years ago, and
its splendid interior can be seen again, mixing
sweeping staircases and Eric Gill carvings with
modern features, such as the cool Long Bar. The
hotel's curvature means most rooms have a sea
view, with top-floor suites having 180-degree vistas
and a hot tub on the balcony. From £125 per room.

DREAM DESIGN

**Artist Residence,
Brighton**
Located near the pretty
Regency Square, high
ceilings, exposed brick
and wooden floorboards
feature throughout Artist
Residence. Rooms display
zingy local artwork,
design-led furniture, and
many have fabulous views
of the sea, while renovated
rooms in the basement
boast fireplaces, roll top
baths and generous living
areas. From £95 per room.



The House Of Hopes And Dreams by Trisha Ashley (Penguin Random House, £12.99) is available in hardback on 8 March.

