



The view of Belper Mill from Bridge Hill House

ROOMS WITH A VALLEY VIEW

*Ashley Franklin visits Steve and Caroline
Cavers of Bridge Hill House – a very modern
home with a hidden historic secret*



Bridge Hill House and garden

EVERY MORNING, while taking in a slice of toast, Steve and Caroline Cavers also take in one of the most historic sights in Derbyshire. Better still, it's a sight shared by their guests: the couple run their Belper home – Bridge Hill House – as a Bed & Breakfast. Nestled in the hillside high up on Lodge Drive, the view down into the valley is of Strutt's North and East Mill.

Sitting down for breakfast, most of their guests soon ask the question: 'What IS that building?' Very few are aware that they have come to a World Heritage Site where the Industrial Revolution and the factory system began.

As Caroline reveals: 'Many of our guests are

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drawn to Derbyshire by the Peak District and are looking to visit the “honey pots” like Chatsworth, Bakewell and Castleton. When we tell them they are looking over “the valley that changed the world” they become intrigued and want to learn more. Before we know it, our guests have rescheduled their itineraries so they can visit the Derwent Valley.'

It's not just the iconic mill that impresses the guests: the house itself has an historic Strutt connection. This sizeable, three-gabled, two storey residence in warm Birchover gritstone sits on

the foundations of farm buildings adjacent to the property built for Jedidiah Strutt's son George Benson Strutt at the end of the 18th century. Nearly 80 years after that house was demolished, Steve and Caroline have brought the Bridge Hill Estate alive again and have just celebrated their first year as a B & B.

Given that Bridge Hill has four fabulous ensuite rooms, all named after figures who shaped the Derwent Valley – Arkwright, Strutt, Slater and Nightingale – it seems as if it was perfectly placed as a B&B. Remarkably though, the house was originally conceived as just a home for Steve and Caroline. Opening it as a guest house was an afterthought – 'more luck than planning' reveals Caroline.

Having both retired and previously been involved in home renovations, the couple was attracted by a Building Plot For Sale notice in an estate agent's window. 'When we viewed it,' said Steve, 'we were bowled over by the location, the space, the close proximity to town and, of course, the views.'

After that came the 'icing' on the cake: the revelation that one of a series of tunnels at the back of the plot led to vaulted chambers – including an ice house – which served the original mansion. 'We knew then that we just had to buy this



above Breakfast on the Terrace



The spiral staircase with a Galileo 20 Light from Dar Lighting



Steve and Caroline Cavers in a corner of The Family Room



wonderful piece of heritage,' says Caroline, 'and we discovered that in 2007 these chambers had been listed as structures of national importance.'

Having worked as a landscape architect, Caroline took on the design herself. In 2006, building work began – with Steve project managing – and the couple moved in despite a lack of heating, hot water or any plaster on the walls.

Eventually the house was made habitable and, in 2009, there was a turning point when they invited some American friends to stay.

'They travel the world and were used to staying in hotels,' explains Caroline. 'When they told us that both the house and the room had a "hotel" feel, the idea of a B&B grew. After five more years of work, we opened last September.'

'Building such a big house for the two of us was a family joke,' admits Steve. 'Nobody understood it and, to be honest, neither did we, though in our defence we always thought this prestigious plot deserved a large, stunning building that made a statement. We also like a challenge.'

Bridge Hill House makes a statement as soon as the guests step inside the front door. 'The hallway always provides a wow factor,' says Caroline. 'There is an immediate sense of space and light and from this ground floor position you can

see right up into the roof space. As you look up, you also see our spiral staircase, cantilevered over the hallway along with a six and a half feet long lighting feature which spirals just like the staircase.'

Interestingly, Steve and Caroline reveal that had they designed the house as a B&B from the outset, it would have turned out differently. 'One decision we made which was just for us was to build the house "upside down" – with bedrooms on the ground floor and living accommodation on the first. We wanted to make the most of the

below Guest living room: 'We went for a stylish, relaxing space with a big, squishy sofa and more formal leather tub chairs. There are views over the Chevin and garden. Curtains made to measure from Dunelm. The room was decorated by Richard Hickling of Rich Interiors, Belper. The wall mounted corner fire is by Harry Leender'





above The Family Room Kitchen: 'The units are from diykitchens.co.uk in Pontefract and include Milton Oak and Milton ivory units with solid oak worktops which complement the engineered wide board oak flooring and the huge black granite floor tiles in the kitchen area.'

views but also the best use of the grounds in that the living spaces could connect to the higher levels of the garden via terraces and bridges, making the whole plot flow and connect.'

'As it has turned out, the guests don't mind at all that their rooms are on the ground floor. Better still, they love the view from the breakfast table and the terrace outside, as well as in the lounge.'

Once Steve and Caroline decided to open as a B&B, their aim was clear: 'Our philosophy for the Bed & Breakfast was in the name – to ensure we provided the best possible sleep and food.'

For the best sleep, they went for 'high quality

beds, superior linen and stylish bedding.' For example, the Zip & Link Super King Size Bed in the Arkwright Suite is a 10,000 sprung angora mattress on a sprung base. 'So comfortable,' reveals Caroline, 'that guests have missed breakfast so that they can spend longer in bed!'

Breakfast, though, is not to be missed, having recently earned a quality rating from the AA. Steve and Caroline serve a wide range of juices, fruit, yoghurt and cereals though you also need to find space for a full English or croissants, smoked salmon or maybe Eggs Benedict plus fresh bread baked on the premises. It is served in the Family Room. Whereas most B & Bs have a designated dining room of private tables, Bridge Hill guests sit at a large communal oak table in the kitchen.

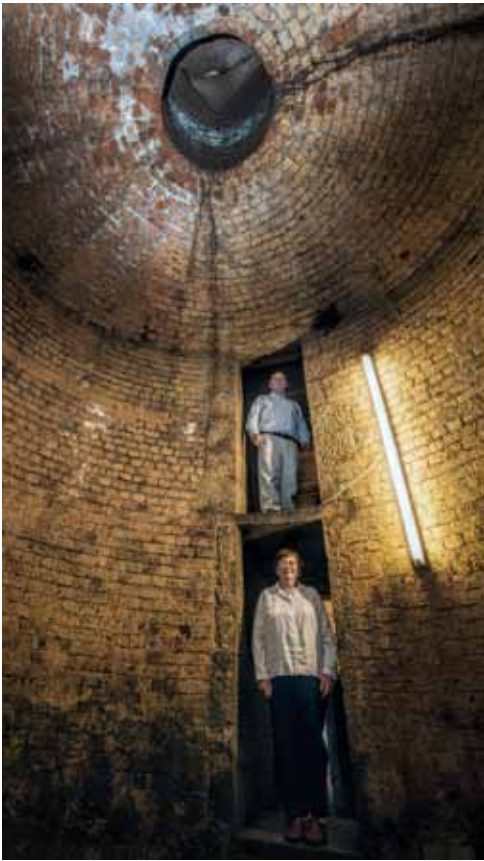
'Again, had we initially thought of a B&B, we would have created a separate kitchen,' admits Caroline, 'but our guests actually enjoy watching their breakfast being cooked. It just means we have to keep the kitchen tidy all the time!'

Other guests risk missing breakfast by luxuriating too long in the spacious shower cubicles – 'they love our rainforest shower heads' says Caroline. In general, she and Steve insisted on 'ultra-modern' bathrooms with white sanitary ware, with many hours searching the web for the right accessories such as taps, shower fittings and high quality towels.

Steve and Caroline also deliberated long and hard on room decoration. For example, it took two years to settle on the lounge ceiling lights and four years to choose the internal doors. As it happens, the wallpapers came from one visit



Breakfast in the Family Room



Steve and Caroline in the ice house

to Derby's Dulux Decorator Centre. 'We used textures mostly, keeping the designs plain and simple, so that we could introduce colour to build on,' explains Steve. 'Caroline then chose complementary soft furnishings, mostly from Dunelm, and accessories such as mirrors and lighting came largely from auctions.'

Each room also has its own colour palette, influenced by Steve and Caroline's interpretation of the characters the rooms are named after: 'The Strutt Room, for example, has wallpaper textured with deep greens like the colours of the cedar and yew trees that George Strutt planted around his estate here, and the Arkwright Suite has very modern wallpaper to reflect the fact that Arkwright was always at the forefront of change.'

There is a pleasing palette of colours in the garden which has been kept fairly traditional with Indian sandstone paving and a formal classic water feature in the middle of the front patio. 'The planting, though, is fairly relaxed,' says Caroline, 'concentrating on colour and texture, trying to make it of interest throughout the year.'

Back inside, Steve considered it imperative that the house had state-of-the-art technology. This includes a C-Bus system that allows the control of any light from any light switch in the house, an installation that involved just under three miles of wiring. Almost one and a half miles of piping went into creating the underfloor heating system, and there is a vacuum system which involves plugging a hose into vacuum sockets around the house – dirt and dust is then sucked

along hidden tubes into a collection point. Steve also put in mechanical ventilation with heat exchangers, ensuring fresh air flows in while stale air is extracted, and all the stale air transferred to the fresh.

A huge hot water store was added to control the underfloor heating and radiators and for general hot water – a set-up involving nine pumps. The house is hard-wired for networking throughout and has Wi-Fi and a hotel-style satellite and terrestrial TV and FM system. There are also plans for a small cinema in one of the vaulted chambers.

Away from all this domestic modernity, guests can view the foremost in late 18th century refrigeration by visiting the Strutt ice house. Restoring this piece of heritage was a prodigious task: Steve and Caroline had to dig out over 40 tons of spoil that had been dropped down the hole in the top of the ice house, along with old pushchairs, broken buckets and piles of mud.

'Guests are bowled over by its size and construction,' says Steve. Opening up the ice house has also delighted the team at Derwent Valley Mills as they now arrange tours of the building.'

In fact, Steve and Caroline actively promote the area to their guests, enhancing their B&B provision by offering bespoke vacations (www.visitenglandtours.uk). Steve provides chauffeured visits to attractions in Derbyshire and beyond and has had discussions with Visit Peak with a view to offering a package entitled Celebrating the Grand Tour. 'Naturally, we always recommend a visit to the Derwent Valley,' smiles Steve.

Clearly, Steve and Caroline are thrilled that they have not only given new life to a historic estate but also given themselves a new life. 'We couldn't be happier,' says Caroline. 'We love meeting so many different people and it's so rewarding when you get comments like "I can't say it was home from home as this was better than my home" or the American who told me she knew she had a good time because she didn't want to go home. We also have many guests who have vowed to return because they have only just discovered the Derwent Valley and want to explore it further.' ♦

www.bridgehillhouse.co.uk



The 'wow factor' of the hallway

TRADESMEN

Building contractor for foundations, block work and stonework
– Brook-Building, Nottingham

All other general building work – Andy Johnson
Decorator; Rich Interiors
– Richard Hickling, Cemetery Road, Belper
Joiner and cabinet maker
– Chris Robinson
www.little-woodshop-derbyshire.co.uk in Belper



The Arkwright Suite