

ON THE TURN

If you've a head for heights and an appetite for a truly unique Suffolk experience The Windmill at Cockfield can satisfy.

Words: Jayne Lindill

THINGS don't actually turn at The Windmill in Cockfield these days. Built in 1891 by one of the county's leading millwrights, the sails stopped turning in 1900 and the traditional cap was removed 20 years later. The building was used as a store and then stood derelict. Until along came Steve and Natalie Roberts.

Tired of London life in Barnet, the couple had embarked on a search for a country property where they could live and earn an income, and preferably take Natalie's mum with them. They were visiting Bury St Edmunds Christmas Market in 2007 when they spotted in the property pages of the local paper a house with a dilapidated windmill attached. It was just what they were looking for. The three of them pooled funds to buy the property. Natalie and Steve moved into the house, and Natalie's mum a self-contained cottage converted from an outbuilding. They then switched their thoughts to the mill.

"It had to be a commercial project," said Natalie. Luxury holiday accommodation with a difference was the plan. With Beech Architects on board, they set out to preserve the building but give it a modern twist. It was a long haul, involving eight years of planning bids, listening to community opinions, getting the design right and grappling with the challenges of an old building. The actual conversion took more than 18 months to



The Windmill

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complete. Steve quit his job as a surveyor in 2014 to manage the project and, with the help of a structural engineer, did much of the work.

The result is literally outstanding. The 60 feet high mill is topped by a zinc clad 'pod' which has ensured its position as a local and architectural landmark. The living space ascends from the kitchen on the ground floor, through the bedrooms and bathrooms on the first and second floors, which are beautifully furnished and decorated, to the living space at the top - the aforementioned 'pod'. This is the spectacular achievement of Sudbury carpenter and joiner Ron Hill, who cut and placed the flexible timber rib system, and Beech Architects who came up with the design for the futuristic pod. Its appearance has divided opinion, but the conversion project has won awards from RICS and RIBA. If you've a head for heights, there's a balcony where you can enjoy tremendous views over the Suffolk countryside. And if heights aren't your thing, the enormous windows will enable you to take it all in from the comfort of the plush sofas.

STAY

The Windmill sleeps four adults (not suitable for people with disabilities).

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