

Home-made perfection

A couple who run a bed and breakfast near Exeter are masters in the art of hospitality, discovers CATHERINE COURTENAY

AT the end of a cherry blossom driveway, just off a lane on the way to Talaton, you'll find Larkbeare Grange, an elegant Georgian house which enjoys far reaching pastoral views across the surrounding countryside.

The view was what first attracted Charlie and Julia Hutchings to the property – with the house itself a very close second.

Larkbeare Grange is the sort of building which longs to have visitors, to be filled with people, and it makes perfect sense that the Hutchings have made it into a luxury bed and breakfast. There's a sense of occasion in walking up to the big front door, with its covered porchway, where you then ring the bell. It opens to reveal a spacious hall with a staircase leading upstairs. There's a ticking grandfather clock and a smiling Julia welcomes you to her home. Before long you're settled in a comfy armchair by the wood-burner in the lounge, eating the most divine oven-warm miniature scones and sipping tea poured from a proper teapot.

Charlie and Julia have put huge amounts of time and love into restoring this property and have used skilled craftsmen to do the work. They've sourced period furniture to use alongside their own family items and created a beautiful home, filled with antique bits and bobs; there are luxurious fabrics throughout – the drapes in the breakfast room being a stand-out feature.

Charlie comes from a hotel background, including working for the Savoy Group and he's a rather good cook, rustling up the perfect cooked breakfast, or delights like kedgeree or smoked salmon and egg. Food is cooked on the Aga, including freshly made organic bread – and those scones. The care that goes into sourcing the excellent, high quality ingredients used in the breakfasts mirrors the whole approach at Larkbeare, where Charlie



The breakfasts at Larkbeare Grange are memorable



Comfortable rooms feature period furniture



The impressive entrance, with its covered porchway

and Julia aim to do things perfectly. Mention has to be made of Charlie's home-made marmalade and jams, he's addicted to making preserves and the couple take great delight in gathering basketfuls of locally grown fruits.

Interestingly, Larkbeare is not all about a return to the past, because Charlie and Julia have been equally passionate about making a fully 'green' business. Their environmental policy, from a biomass boiler to electric car charging point, to recycling and annual tree planting activities, has won them heaps of awards. This forward-thinking ethos is most apparent in The Granary, a high tech, modern self catering apartment with its own pretty garden. So different in style to the main house, but sharing the same tickboxes of quality, beauty and attention to detail.

A good bed and breakfast should feel like staying in a friend's fabulous home, very different to a hotel and far more personal. You also need to be aware of other guests, with whom you may share a breakfast table. This people-centred approach doesn't appeal to everyone, and it may seem rude if you want to be glued to a tablet or phone while eating your toast. But a stay here is about reconnecting with the physical world around you and enjoying the hospitality and companionship of fellow human beings.

I guarantee you'll walk away from Larkbeare both refreshed in spirit and feeling like you're leaving home. ♦

Rates start from £110 for a classic double or twin room with full English breakfast. larkbeare.net

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROSS HAYWARD

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