



The Torre Suite bedroom – complete with zebra head.

## The 25 Boutique *earns its stripes*

After being named among the top ten B&Bs in the entire world, **GAVIN HIRD** paid a visit to The 25 Boutique to find out if it really is worthy of such a lofty accolade

**T**HINK of Torquay B&Bs and you might conjure up images of stuffy managers and bumbling waiters.

But The 25 Boutique is as far removed from Fawlty Towers as it's possible to imagine. The fact that Basil Fawlty would have hated this place is the highest praise I can bestow. This multi award-winning B&B has been owned and run for the past three years by Andy and Julian Banner-Price, and it is no exaggeration to say that the pair pride themselves on that unusual quality of turning guests into their friends. While it would be fair to say that The 25 - while immaculately clean and well presented - doesn't look anything special from the outside, once you step

through the front doors is when the magic begins. You are immediately confronted by a life-sized mannequin in all the colours of the rainbow that doubles as a light stand. It is this kind of quirkiness - which continues with a zebra in our bedroom among many other examples (more on that later) - that has helped The 25 on its way to numerous awards. It was recently named among the top ten B&Bs in the entire world, and I've certainly never stayed in a place quite like this before. Adding to the major award tally, the six-bed venue won Silver for 'B&B of the Year' at Visit England's Tourism Excellence awards in April, and topped that days later by being crowned "Unique B&B of the Year" at the

annual AA B&B Awards in London. These accolades followed its success in January when the five star bed and breakfast received the prestigious Travellers' Choice Award from travel review site TripAdvisor, placing them in the top five in the UK and top ten in the world. Andy said: "We were delighted to win a national award from TripAdvisor, but to go on to win two more national awards was amazing. It's fantastic to be recognised for our hard work. We created our own ideal place to stay at The 25 and are thrilled so many people love what we do." Julian added: "At The 25 we literally took many areas of the building back to the brick and started again. It was an opportunity to make sure we did everything right. From high pressure



showers to sockets in the right places, but it's much more than that. It's all the little touches that make us such a unique, special place to stay."

The 25 Boutique B&B has six very different bedrooms, all with cutting edge design by Andy and the latest technology by former IT manager Julian.

The pair used to run a country house hotel in Wales and employed several members of staff. They took the decision to move somewhere smaller on the English Riviera so they could have complete control over all aspects of the operation and give visitors the holiday experience they would expect to receive themselves.

We were given the Torre suite for our stay - a black, white and yellow themed room (Port Vale fans may feel at home here) with a model of a zebra's head on one wall. The zebra is named Frank for reasons unknown. The room was so spotless that my partner and I felt like the first guests to ever stay in this room.

A quick examination of our surroundings showed that every possible eventuality had been thought of. Every single drawer contains something useful - from a torch to a toothbrush, shaving kit and even hair straighteners.

But it is the tech and personal touches which really set the room apart. We had a huge flat-screen TV with access to Netflix and movies on demand. There was a further TV in the changing room, and even one in the bathroom. We also had an Amazon Alexa, allowing us to use voice control



Exterior of The 25.

for elements like the air conditioning, playing the radio and adjusting the various mood light settings.

The room even had i-Pads, Elemis toiletries, superfast wi-fi pinged at 38mbps, and colour-coded Nespresso machines.

Every room receives daily home baked treats and hand-written notes from the owners.

Andy said: "We've tried to think of everything to make a stay with us truly memorable. We could easily buy cakes and biscuits to put in the rooms, but it's the homemade touches that make all the difference."

This theme continues at breakfast with homemade yogurts and cereals, alongside all the classic favourites, and all the preserves you could image. Not just jam and marmalade for Andy and Julian's guests/friends, there's even Marmite should you really want to. Despite running the entire operation between just two people, they take the time to chat over breakfast, and again



Mannequin light stand



Homemade gifts are a feature of The 25

show that unique ability to make you feel right at home when many miles away.

Julian said: "We're perfectionists and we actually care about our guests." At The 25, they certainly do.

■ The 25 Boutique is situated on 25 Avenue Road, 10 minutes walk from the railway station. Rooms are priced from £125 to £179 per night.



Andy and Julian Banner-Price win Silver in the 'Bed and Breakfast of the Year' category